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BEWITCHED

J. BARBEY D'AUREVILLY

BEWITCHED

BY THE AUTHOR OF

LES DIABOLIQUES

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

LOUISE COLLIER WILLCOX

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

ERNEST BOYD

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BEWITCHED

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FIRST EDITION

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INTRODUCTION

ALTHOUGH Rémy de Gourmont described him as "one of the most original figures in the literature of the nineteenth century," the name of Jules Amédée Barbey d'Aurevilly has been ignored by all the leading historians of French literature. His champions are a select if curious minority ranging from such orthodox critics as Sir Edmund Gosse and Paul Bourget to Oscar Wilde, who translated *What Never Dies*, and Edgar Saltus, whose version of *A Story Without a Name* was the first of his works to be published in English. The explanation of this was also furnished by Gourmont when he said that d'Aurevilly would long remain "one of those rare and almost subterranean classics which are the real life of French literature. Their altar is in the depths of a crypt, but the faithful are always ready to go down there, whereas the church of the major saints stands open in its emptiness and boredom to the light of day."

Barbey d'Aurevilly was born in 1808 at Saint-Sauveur-le-Vicomte, the Norman hamlet which he mentions in *Bewitched* as being "as pretty as a Scottish village," and as having seen "Du Guesclin defending his keep against the English." It is there that his bust by Rodin stands in front of the town hall, and a couple of years ago the Barbey d'Aurevilly Museum was opened to preserve the manu-

INTRODUCTION

scripts and the few possessions of the writer who bore the proud title of the Constable of Letters. That peninsula whose most familiar point to foreigners is Cherbourg was the birthplace of the man and his work, for his stories rarely strayed outside the boundaries of La Manche. He has been called "the Walter Scott of Normandy."

His life spanned the long and varied period of eighty-one years from the First Empire to the Third Republic, and in his later years he seemed like some legendary figure of the past as evoked in his own works. Sir Edmund Gosse suggests this picture of him: "At the close of his life . . . he was still to be seen walking the streets or haunting the churches of Paris, his long, sparse hair flying in the wind, his fierce eyes flashing about him, his hat poised on the side of his head, his famous lace frills turned back over the cuff of his coat, his attitude always erect, defiant, and formidable. Down to the winter of 1888 he preserved the dandy dress of 1840, and never appeared but as M. de Pontmartin has described him, in black satin trousers, which fitted his old legs like a glove, in a flapping, brigand wide-awake, in a velvet waistcoat, which revealed diamond studs and a lace cravat, and in a wonderful shirt that covered the most artful pair of stays. In every action, in every glance, he seemed to be defying the natural decay of years, and to be forcing old age to forget him by dint of spirited and ceaseless self-assertion. He was himself the prototype of all the

INTRODUCTION

Brassards and Mesnilgrands of his stories, the dandy of dandies, the mummified and immortal beau."

His work, like himself, was outside of its time, and appeals as a picturesque survival of the era of Chateaubriand and Romanticism. He regarded himself as a devoted Catholic, but his stories of diabolical possession and damned souls, priestly and lay, were the occasion of grave scandal to the pious. The Abbé de la Croix-Jugan in *Bewitched* has many counterparts in d'Aurevilly's writings, such as the Abbé Sombreval in *Un Prêtre Marié*, or the Capuchin father, Riculf, in *A Story Without a Name*. Rape and incest had a special charm for this belated Byronian, which were irreconcilable to more conventional minds with his professions of great concern for faith and morals. Jules Lemaître thought that there was "nothing less Christian than the Catholicism of M. d'Aurevilly," and the Archbishop of Paris ordered every copy of *Un Prêtre Marié* to be destroyed. Even *Les Diaboliques* narrowly escaped complete suppression.

"Diabolical" indeed is the adjective which might be applied not only to the six types of women possessed by a devil which that book exemplified, but to almost all his characters, for Barbey d'Aurevilly was in Lemaître's phrase "deliciously fascinated by the devil." His interest in the Catholic Church and in the Chouan wars was essentially romantic and imaginative; they supplied the material upon which his aristocratic fancy could thrive unhindered by facts. *Bewitched* is an excellent example of this

INTRODUCTION

dual strain in him, and is commonly regarded as his best novel. From the moment the story opens, the atmosphere of terror and superstition is maintained, while all the author's powers of evocation are felt in the drawing of Croix-Jugan and Jeanne de Feuardent and in his descriptions of religious ceremonies, of the sinister moor of Lessay, and of the primitive ardent souls of Blanchelande.

In the preface to the original edition Barbey d'Aurevilly tried to defend his preoccupation as a pious son of the Church with crimes of passion. "As for the manner," he wrote, "in which the author has described the results of passion and has sometimes expressed its language, he has shown that broad catholicism which is not afraid to refer to human passions when it is a question of inspiring fear of their consequences. Being a novelist, he has fulfilled the novelist's task, which is to show the soul of man at grips with sin, and he has done this without shame or mock majesty." But he did not in his lifetime convince the orthodox, and the modern reader has no difficulty in recognizing the Catholic Sadism of his work.

Bewitched is a study of amorous possession in conflict with the more powerful obsession of religious and patriotic partisanship, the book of love and death of a woman, a race, a cause. In it will be found every element of Barbey d'Aurevilly's peculiar genius, his romantic passion for lost causes, his delicate sense of landscape, of light and shade, of strange characters, his sinister delight in the horrible

INTRODUCTION

and blasphemous. When the book first appeared in 1854 it included between its covers one of the most celebrated stories in *Les Diaboliques*, "Beneath the Cards of a Game of Whist." Readers of that volume will find the present work akin to it in mood and spirit.

Towards the end of his life Barbey d'Aurevilly enjoyed notoriety and something of the fame which were denied to him in the heyday of his powers, save by an *élite*. Sainte-Beuve, it is true, went on record with the earliest important tribute, shortly after *Bewitched* appeared: "M. Barbey d'Aurevilly, who has long since proved himself in fiction and in the daily press as a proud and brilliant man of talent, of the highest intelligence with high aims, wields a pen of which it can be said without flattery that it often resembles a sword. Thoughts spring from him fully armed, his images flower naturally; all he need do is to choose from amongst them, to sacrifice some in order that the others may be seen to their advantage."

Selection and moderation, however, were not for a man of his temperament. He could make no compromises either with the powers that be or with the promptings of his own reckless imagination. All through his long life he wrote and lived in poverty, leaving over sixty volumes of his collected works, poetry, biography, fiction, and criticism. His critical writings, by which he lived, are voluminous and erratic, and earned for him enmities which the sbrewder Sainte-Beuve knew how to avoid. D'Aure-

INTRODUCTION

villy, on the other hand, could claim to have been a Stendhalian before it was fashionable, and to have greeted new talents, like those of Baudelaire, Becque, and Huysmans, while the mandarins still hesitated.

Aside from the interest attaching to Barbey d'Aurevilly in the history and perspective of modern French literature, he can be read by all who care for the bizarre and fantastic, who can respond to the fascination of a style which was described, in words worthy of him, as "brutal and exquisite, violent and delicate, bitter and sweet. . . . A witches' brew composed of flowers and serpents, tigers' blood and honey." Intrepid, arrogant, puerile, magnificent, the style in this case was assuredly the very man. Just as Barbey d'Aurevilly in his old age drew about him in his poor Paris lodgings the best of the young generation which has since made his fame secure, so perhaps *Bewitched* will gain for him on this side of the Atlantic readers who want to know more of the author of *Les Diaboliques*—heretofore his most popular book in English.

ERNEST BOYD

BEWITCHED

BEWITCHED

Chapter One

THE moor of Lessay is one of the largest of that portion of Normandy called the Peninsula of Cotentin. A cultivated land of fertile valleys, green pastures, rivers full of fish, Cotentin, this French Vale of Tempe, this rich and cultivated country, has, nevertheless, as well as its neighbor, Brittany, parts like la Pauvresse-aux-Genêts, sterile and bare, where men pass on and nothing grows except a few scant grasses and a little furze that soon dries up. These gaps in fertility, these spots destitute of vegetation—bald heads, so to speak—form ordinarily a striking contrast to the lands about. They are oases of aridity in a fertile country, as in a desert of sand there are oases of verdure. They are like sudden interruptions of melancholy, a tragic prospect, a severe aspect in the midst of a fresh, laughing, fecund land. They mark it with a blacker stomp. Generally such spots have a rather limited horizon. The traveler entering them glances across and sees the boundary. Hedges of cultivated fields limit them everywhere. But if, on the contrary, one finds them wide and vast it would be hard to express the effect upon the imagination of those who cross

them, the profound and bizarre witchery they exercise on mind and heart. Who does not know the charm of the moors? Perhaps only seascapes, the sea and its strands, have as impressive and moving a power. They are like rags of a primitive and wild poetry left on the soil, which the hand and the harrow of man have torn; sacred rags which will disappear shortly with a breath of modern industrialism; for our era, grossly material and utilitarian, undertakes to destroy every bit of untilled land and heath from the globe, as from the human soul.

Enslaved by second-hand ideas, Society, the old housewife, has nothing new but her current needs; she dodders about her enlightenment; she has no understanding of the divine ignorance of the mind, that poetry of the soul which she would exchange for sorry and incomplete knowledge, admitting only the poetry of the eyes, hidden yet visible beneath the apparent futility of things. Should this frightful movement of modern thought continue, we shall hardly have, in a few years, a scrap of land where imagination can set its foot to rest and dream, as the heron does on one leg. For under the reign of the stodgy genius for physical ease, mistaken for progress and civilization, there will be neither ruins, nor beggars, nor waste lands, nor superstitions like those that form the subject of this story, even if the sophistication of our day permits us to tell it.

It is this double poetry of an untilled soil and the ignorance of those who dwell on it, that was to be found some years ago in the wild and famous moor

of Lessay. Those who have passed through it can bear witness of it. Set between the Haie-du-Puits and Coutances, this Norman desert, destitute of trees, houses, hedges, tracks of man and beast (other than tracks of the passer-by and the moving flocks in the dust when it was dry, or in the mud of the path when it had rained), displayed a grandeur of solitude and desolate sadness difficult to forget. The moor, it was said, was seven leagues around. What is certain is that it took a man on horseback, with a good mount, more than two hours to cross it in a straight line. In the opinion of the countryside it was a formidable crossing. When crossing from St.-Sauveur-le-Vicomte, that little village pretty as a Scotch town, where du Guesclin defended the dungeon against the English, or from the shore of the peninsula to Coutances, taking crosscuts to save time, for the main road and public vehicles were not on this side, one went with several companions over the terrible stretch; and this was so usual that those few courageous fellows who went alone to Lessay by day or night were long cited as brave men in the parishes about.

People talked vaguely of the murders that had been committed there in other days. And truly such a place lent itself to such tales. It would have been difficult to pick out a place better adapted for rifling a traveler or dispatching an enemy. The space before and around was so considerable and so bare that anyone coming to the aid of those attacked by the bandits of these parts

could be seen at a great distance and avoided or escaped; and at night so vast a silence would have devoured any cries breaking from the moor's depths. But that was not all.

If one believed the tales of wagoners belated there, the moor of Lessay was the scene of even more singular apparitions. In the language of the people, "They came back there." For these muscular people, brave and prudent, armed with precautions and courage against any tangible and certain danger, this was the really sinister and menacing side of the moor, since imagination will continue to be, for a long time hence, the most powerful reality in the lives of men. This alone, much more than the idea of a nocturnal attack, made the ash plant tremble in the hand of the most vigorous lad daring to traverse Lessay at the fall of day. Moreover, if he had been amusing himself with a beaker or a pint pot at the Red Bull, a tavern of ill-repute which stood alone and naked against the horizon toward Coutances, it was no wonder if the good fellow saw, through the fog of his brain and the trembling lines of the solitary spaces, clouds of evening vapors or white patches of dew, those things which, the next morning in his accounts, added to the frightful reputation of the deserted place. One of the sources of the most inexhaustibly evil rumors which ran about Lessay and its neighborhood was an ancient abbey, destroyed by the Revolution of 1789, which, rich and celebrated, was known for thirty leagues about by the name of

Blanchelande. Founded in the twelfth century by the favorite of Henry II, King of England, the Norman Richard de la Haye, and by his wife, Matilde de Vernon, this abbey near Lessay, whose ruins were still to be seen a few years ago, rose formerly in a spacious valley, not deep, but heavily wooded, between the parishes of Varenguebec, Lithaire, and Neufmesnil. The monks who had always inhabited it were powerful canons of the Order of St. Norbert, more commonly called Premonstratensians. As to the picturesque, poetic, and almost virginal name of Blanchelande—the name, that last sigh remaining when things have passed—the antiquaries give, alas! but the most uncertain etymology. Did it derive from the soil, which surrounded the abbey and had a foundation of pale clay, or the white vestments of the canons, or from the stuff which was to become the linen of the community, which they spread on the grounds about the abbey, on the dependent lands, to bleach it in the night dews? However that may be, if we are to believe the irreverent chronicles of the countryside, the Monastery of Blanchelande had nothing virginal about it but the name. It was whispered about that frightful scenes took place there just before the Revolution burst forth. What credence must we lend such whispers? Why should not the enemies of the Church, needing motives for demolishing the religious monuments of another age, begin by tearing down with calumny what they finished with ax and hammer? Or why, indeed, in those days

when faith faltered in the worn hearts of the people, should incredulity not already have germinated corruption in the consecrated shelter of the most saintly virtues? Who knows? No one. The fact remains that, true or false, these alleged scandals at the very foot of the altar, this gossip hidden by the convents, this sacrilege which God finally punished by a social cataclysm more terrible than any thunder from the clouds, left, right or wrong, a trail of stories in the memory of the people, eager to gather up, by a double instinct of human nature, everything criminal, depraved and sinister as well as everything marvelous.

A few years ago I was traveling through this neighborhood whose striking aspect I so much wish the reader to seize. I was coming back from Coutances, the seat of a bishop, but a melancholy town with its narrow, damp streets, where I had had to stay a few days; it had put me in a mood perhaps for the profound impressions of the country I was passing through. My soul harmonized perfectly at that time with anything isolated or sad. It was October, the ripe season which drops into the basket of Time like a golden grape bruised by its fall, and though I am not temperamentally dreamy I was enjoying to the full these last touching days of the year when melancholy has its ecstasy. I was interested in every incident along the way I traveled. I was traveling on horseback like a wanderer in by-paths. A worthy son of my ancestors, the Chouans, I had no objection to moonlight and ad-

venture. I was armed like the corsair, Surcouf, whose town I had just left, and I minded little when I saw night falling on my mantle. Just a few minutes before dusk, which comes so fast, as every one knows in the autumn season, I found myself opposite the tavern of the Red Bull, which had nothing red about it but its ochre-colored shutters, and which, placed at the edge of the moor of Lessay, seemed from this side to be guarding the entrance to it. As I was a stranger, though a native of the country which I had left long since, passing for the first time through the moor, flat as a sea of oil, where sometimes men who cross it habitually are lost at night, or at any rate have great trouble to keep to the way, I thought it prudent to ask some directions about the road before committing myself to the treacherous stretch. I turned my horse in to the tumble-down building which I had just reached. Through the door, surmounted by a great bush of withered thorn, I heard rude voices, apparently belonging to people drinking and chatting inside. The oblique rays of the setting sun twice as sad as usual since it marked two endings—that of the day and that of the year—tinged with a muddy yellow the thatched hut, brown as sepia, and the half-crumbled chimney sent up dreamily toward the tranquil sky a thin little puff of blue smoke from the peat fire which the poor cover with cabbage leaves to prevent it burning too fast.

From the distance I had seen a ragged little girl throwing clover to a cow tied by a plaited straw rope

to the shutter of the tavern and I asked her, as I came near, what I wanted to know. The amiable child evidently did not see fit to reply, or perhaps she did not understand me, for she stared at me with two big grey eyes, calm and mute as steel disks, and, turning on her bare heels, entered the house, twisting her flaxen hair on her head, whence it had fallen while I was talking. An old woman sapless and knotty as a hickory bough hardened by fire (for her, doubtless the fire of adversity), evidently warned by the little creature, came to the threshold and asked me what I wanted in a harsh, drawling voice.

And I, knowing myself in Normandy, the country of all the earth where practical life is best understood and the policy of self-interest dominates everyone, asked her to give a good measure of oats to my horse and to water it with a pot of cider, and afterward I would explain more clearly what I wanted. The old woman obeyed with the celerity of aroused interest. Her sad and sulky face began to shine like one of the big sous she was to get. She brought the oats in a sort of wooden tub standing on three lame legs, but she could not understand that cider brewed for a Christian should be the drink of an animal. I was obliged to repeat the order to bring me the pot I had asked, and I poured it over the oats in the trough, to her great scandal, apparently, for she clapped her big brown hands, like battle-dores that had lain a long time in ditch water, and

muttered in a sort of dialect which hid some insolence I could not understand.

"Ah, well, mother," I said to her as I watched my horse eat, "now you are going to tell me what road to follow to reach Haie-du-Puits in the dark without losing my way."

She stretched out her withered arm and pointed in the direction to be taken, and gave one of those complicated explanations, utterly unintelligible, in which the sly malice of the peasant, foreseeing the embarrassment of others and enjoying it beforehand, is mixed with the vagueness of the dull and naturally cloudy minds of the people of the lower class.

I did not understand anything she said. I was preparing, as I bridled my horse, to make her repeat it and clear up her confusing directions, when, recollecting an expedient that lighted up her face like a discovery, she turned on the heels of her iron-bound sabots and called out in a sharp voice as she entered the tavern halfway:

"Hi, Maître Tainnebouy, here is a gentleman asking the way to Haie-du-Puits and if you like he will go with you!"

Upon my word, I was not very keen about a companion chosen by her private judgment. The Red Bull had a bad reputation and the look of the old woman was in no wise reassuring. If it was, as was said, a shelter for all sorts of queer folk, of all sorts of vagabonds, this lonely shanty which seemed built by the devil turned mason for some sinister purpose, it was only natural that I should

not be inclined to receive from the hand of the queen of the hut a guide and companion through a dangerous moor which night would soon envelop.

But these reflections, which passed through my mind in less time than it takes to tell it, were no longer valid, despite the darkening hour and the ill repute of the tavern and the sinister look of its hostess, as against the appearance of the man she had called. He emerged from inside the tavern, showing himself, to my agreeable surprise, one of those fellows of fine appearance who need no certificate of good life and morals from mayor or priest, for God had written a magnificent and readable one in every line of his face and figure. As soon as I had scanned him my suspicions fled like a flock of rooks startled suddenly from some old castle by a distant gun-shot in the plain below. I saw at once what sort of man I had to do with. He seemed to have all the necessary qualities for crossing the moor; in short, a face to reassure an honest man and shoulders to alarm a rascal.

He was a man about forty-five years old, strongly built, as they energetically say in the countryside, and such men are really buildings; one of those virile creatures, with a brave face, a frank, firm look, who make one think after all that the male of the woman has his own kind of beauty. He was about five feet, four inches tall, and the old Norman song—

Along the channel
You find the strongest arms—

was never more completely and happily applied. He impressed me at the first glance as a well-to-do farmer of the peninsula, returning from some fair in the neighborhood, and subsequent events proved me right.

But for his hat with its barrel-top, which he had replaced by a narrow-brimmed hat, more suitable for trotting on horseback in the wind, he wore the costume of the Cotentin peasants of my youth: a round waistcoat of blue drugget cut like that of a Spanish *majo*, though more ample and less elegant, short breeches the color of the wool and as tight as buckskin, fastened at the knee with three brass buttons. And I must mention, since he could never have thought of it, that the costume suited him well, showing off muscles of which the least vain of men might be proud. He had drawn up over his ribbed blue stockings, stretched tight over the calves, his long footless boots, which reached from knee to ankle, and were put on over his shoes. These old boots, with but one spur, he had left in the stable with his horse upon arriving, and they were covered with dry mud and dotted with fresh mud, sufficiently testifying that they had covered the road, and a bad road, that day. Mud, too, dirtied to a great height the club, made from the limb of an ash tree, which he carried in his hand, and a leather lash forming a whip was twisted several times around his wrist.

"I have never refused a good companion on the road when God sent him my way," he said with a

rustic accent of cordial and simple courtesy. He lifted his hat slightly and put it back on his strong brown head. His thick, straight hair, cut square and marked by the shears of the unskillful barber who had chopped it off, fell to his shoulders; about his Herculean throat was a cravat that went once around and was tied in a sailor's knot.

"Old Mother Giguet says, sir, that you are going to Haie-du-Puits, where I am going for to-morrow's fair. As I have no cattle to take—and your horse is far too lively to follow a herd of oxen quietly—we might, if you like, take the road together and chat as we go, side by side, like good fellows and, with all due respect to you, a couple of friends. Blanche is not so tired, poor beast, that she cannot keep up with your horse. I know her. She is as proud as a human being. She will snuffle gaily beside your horse. The moor is bad, and if it is like last night, on the moors of Muneville and Mont-survent, the fog will catch us before we get across. I hardly believe that a stranger, as you appear to be, would be able to get out of the fix alone and you would be hunting the way at to-morrow's dawn, or late in the morning, for the sun begins to rise late in this season."

I thanked him for his courtesy and heartily accepted his invitation. There was something in the manner, the voice, the look of the man which attracted and inspired confidence. Although he was a Norman, his shrewd face was not sly. He was almost as dark as a piece of black bread; but tanned

as he was by sun and labor, his color was healthy and strong. He had the hardy confidence of a man used to going up hill and down dale, as indeed he was, by reason of his business and occupations, and like the cavaliers of old, he relied solely upon his personal strength and courage to overcome obstacles and difficulties.

As I said, he spoke with the accent of the countryside, but it was not so barbarous and pronounced as that of the hostess of the Red Bull. It was what it ought to be on the lips of a man who traveled much, as he did, and frequented towns. Only the accent gave to everything he said a tang of the soil, and it so well fitted his life and his personality that if he had not had that accent, something would have been lacking. I told him frankly how happy I was to have him for a companion along the way.

"And," I added, "since you mention the fog, it is nearing the hour when it begins." I pointed to a circle of bluish vapor dancing along the horizon where the setting sun had carried away the last crimson reflections left in the sky. "It would be prudent to start and not to linger any longer."

"True," he said. "It is time to weigh anchor, as the sailors say. Blanche has had her hopperful and I will be with you in a moment. Mother Giguet," he said in his imperious and powerful voice, "what do Blanche and I owe you?"

I saw him plunge his hand into the pocket of his leather belt such as graziers wear in the valley of Auge, and he paid what he owed to his hostess,

who stood on the threshold watching us. He went to get Blanche, as he called her, and she proved worthy of her name, for she was a beautiful mare, white as a bowl of milk, had rosy nostrils, and though mired to her belly, was none the less worthy of her muddy cavalier. She was eating her fill, as he called it, tied by an iron ring to the gable end of the hut. Hidden by a corner of the house, I had not noticed her. As soon as she heard her master's voice she began to neigh and paw the ground with her hoof, showing an almost violent gaiety.

Maitre Tainnebouy, since that was the name of my traveling companion, tightened an enormous blue cloak fixed like a bag to the saddle, bridled his mare, and jumped agilely upon her back with the ease of custom and an aplomb that would have done credit to the most consummate riding master. I've seen many a cut throat in my life, but I never saw one that looked like him. Once in the saddle, he squeezed the horse he was riding between his knees till it neighed.

"That proves," he said to me with the savage pride of a son of Rollo's Normans, "that if we are attacked on our journey, I, alone, with my ash plant, am the man to lend you a hand."

I, too, had paid the hostess of the Red Bull and had mounted my horse. We set out, as he had said, boot to boot, and entered the Lessay moor of ill repute, which seemed, from the very beginning, even more menacing than its reputation, above all as we were starting at the close of an autumn day.

Chapter Two

WHEN we had turned our backs on the Red Bull and crossed a sort of plateau where the road disappeared and the moor of Lessay commenced, we found ourselves facing several parallel paths which streaked across the moor and, as they went on, spread farther and farther apart, ending all of them at points far distant from one another. Visible at first along the surface of the ground as far as the boundaries of the moor, they disappeared bit by bit as we plunged along them, and we had not gone far before we lost every trace of them even by daylight. It was just moorland. The path had disappeared. Here was the ever-present danger for the traveler. A few steps would throw him completely off the way, without his noticing it, into space where, to waver involuntarily from the straight line, is fatal, and he would wander like a ship without a compass, only to find himself at the wrong side of the moor far distant from his destination after turning and returning a thousand times. This accident, common enough on a plain where there are no landmarks in the emptiness, no tree, nor bush, nor hummock to direct him, is expressed by the peasants of Cotentin picturesquely and superstitiously. They say of a traveler thus astray, "he has walked on weeds," and they insinuate thereby some hidden charm or sor-

cery, and the vagueness and mystery satisfy them.

"There is the path we ought to follow," said my companion, pointing with the end of his stick to a white line lost in the moor. "Hold your horse a little to the right, sir, and don't be afraid to rely upon me. The path will soon be lost and it makes a dangerous, almost imperceptible curve here. In a few more minutes it will be night and we can no longer see where we are by looking back to the Red Bull. Fortunately, Blanche knows a road she has traveled as a hunting dog knows its track. Often coming back from fairs and markets sleep overcame me in the saddle, and I arrived anyhow, just as if I had been whistling M. de Matignon's song all the time to amuse myself, with my eyes open and mind alert."

"Was not that rather imprudent?" I said. "For traveling at night over unfrequented roads like these, are you not exposed to unexpected attacks by miserable vagabonds, who wander over these isolated parts in the dark? Above all, if you are accustomed to wear a leather belt as stuffed out as the one I see round your waist?"

"I will not say it was not, sir," he replied. "But after all there is the Grace of God! There are moments when, strong as you may be, after having drunk in ten different tents at a fair, and shouted your throat hoarse to sell ten oxen, fatigue gets you and overcomes you, and you would sleep under the bell of Colomby in a hurricane; all the more since Blanche has a gait as soft as a cradle and a sure

foot. But as for those rascals you speak of, certain it is they might have played me many an ugly trick if they found me snoring in my saddle as I do at the curé's sermons. Fortunately, Blanche never sees a suspicious object, either by moonlight or in the shadows, without neighing so loud that it would drown the noise of a mill. So I was always on the defensive in time and ready to call to account the worst rascals who came after me."

"And you called them to account, sometimes?" I asked. "For I have heard the roads are anything but safe in this part of the country."

"Oh, two or three little encounters, sir," he replied. "Mere trifles not worth talking about—a few blows with my stick here and there which made the rascals howl like a dog whipped in the street. But I've never been skinned yet. Either they were not expecting what they got, or they ran, or fell to the ground like a package of soiled linen, and that was the best thing they could do, for I could never hit a man when he was down—and Blanche always jumped over them. But all that was years ago, in the time of the famous Lemaire who was guillotined at Caen, in the time of the so-called pewter peddlers who set fire to many a farm hereabouts. Now the roads are quiet and, except for this one, because of the moor, there is not a single one in the Manche, as I have noticed for some time, where a fellow has to rise in his stirrups to look over the hedges and make an extra loop in the strap round his wrist."

"And do you often travel in this neighborhood?" I asked as I took care to keep my horse to the pace of his.

"Five or six times a year, sir," he said, "I make my rounds. I come first to St.-Michel's fair at Coutances, to Crottée, to the big fairs at Créance, where there are two in summer and two in winter. That is about all, if I am not mistaken. As you see, I am not a great frequenter of this road. My business is on the other side, on the side of Caen and Bayeux, where I go to sell the Auge folk of those highlands the oxen they take to Poissy, which come, like all those they take there, from the pastures of lower Cotentin and not from the valley of Auge of which they are so proud."

"I see you are a grazier of the peninsula," I said, smiling at his breeder's pride, "a cattleman from the very point of the peninsula. Though you took me for a stranger, and I have lost the accent which might tell your ear that I am a compatriot, I, nevertheless, belong to the country here, and if my ear has not forgotten, as my tongue has, the sounds once familiar to me, you, from your speech, must be from Saint-Sauveur-le-Vicomte or from Briquebec."

"Sure as the scales!" he cried out in a joyous explosion at the idea of my being his compatriot. "You have hit the nail on the head, my dear sir! Truly I come from Saint-Sauveur-le-Vicomte, for I lease the great farm of Mont-de-Rauville which, as you know, since you come from this section, is between Saint-Sauveur and Valognes. I am a grazier

and farmer, as all my people have been, honest red waistcoats all of them from father to son, and as my seven boys will be, God bless them! The race of Tainnebouy owes everything to the soil, and will never do anything else, at least so long as Maître Louis is alive, for children have their own caprices. Who can say what will happen once we are gone?"

He spoke these last words with a certain melancholy. I praised the honest Cotentin fellow for his intelligent and courageous resolution, which is unfortunately no longer found among the farmers of our rich agricultural provinces. I, who believe that the strongest societies, if not the most brilliant, live by imitation and tradition, by things picked up again where time had interrupted them: I, indeed, who have more relish for a caste system, despite its hardships, than for a system which develops all the human faculties quickest, and I, who on the other hand admired the ease, candor, the attitude of body and mind, the simplicity, all the virility which flowed nobly and peaceably through this man, I felt he had a twofold reason for wishing that his children might be what he was and no more.

I saw that this big head, set on robust shoulders as solid as the battlement that crowns a tower, would not easily be led astray by the false ideas spread about the world, though he must often have heard them at the fairs and markets he attended. He was a man of the old school. When he spoke of God, he raised his hand to his hat and lightly lifted it, without any affectation. Night had not yet

fallen so completely that I could not discern the mute gesture. As we advanced along the moor, encircled by a moving mist that enveloped us little by little, beneath the cold and veiled moon, I took up the conversation which my reflections upon my companion's good sense had suspended for an instant.

"My word!" I said to him looking about, for the fog was not yet so dense that we could not see quite a distance in front and around, "I am much disposed to believe you, Maître Louis Tainnebouy, when you make an exception of this moor of Lessay, to the safe roads of your department. I, like you, am also a night traveler: I have gone about in more than one country in my life, but as well as I can remember I have never seen a place that so lent itself to nocturnal attack. There are no trees, it is true, where a fellow could hide to await and surprise a traveler, but there are folds in the land, mounds behind which the villains might lie flat on their bellies, to avoid being seen and shoot as a man passed."

"By the bird of Saint Luke who is the patron of drovers," said the honest farmer, "you are strong on guessing, as they say here. Just now you guessed, when you heard me talk, that I came from Saint-Sauveur-le-Vicomte, and now you have guessed the methods of those cursed bandits, when there were any about here. Truly as you say, sir, they hide behind the mounds, like a hare in its burrow, for there are lots of places like that in this country

which is as lumpy as a peddler's copper pan. Most frequently, if they went in couples, they would place themselves, as one might say, one here and one there, and as you passed, one would jump up from his hiding-place and grab the horse's bridle, while the other came out of his hiding-place, seized you by the thighs, and the two of them would soon have you dismounted. Sometimes they were not so ceremonious; they contented themselves with firing a load of shot instead of lifting their hats. Who the devil would hear a gun-shot in this place, especially on this side of the moor? Mother Giguet would take good care not to whisper a word about it for fear of discrediting her house."

"Its reputation hardly smells of balm, my friend," I said; "at Coutances they told me not to linger there too long."

"That is just idle gossip and scandal," replied Maître Louis Tainnebouy, "a sort of bad reputation which clings to the entire neighborhood of the moor, and to the look of the tavern more than anything else. I have known Mother Giguet more than twenty years, sir. Her husband was a butcher at Sainte-Mère-Église. I've sold him more than one pair of oxen and he always paid me to the last stiver, as they say. But misfortune entered their house at the death of their daughter, a pretty sprig of a blonde, with cheeks as red as her Sunday apron, who died just as she came of marriageable age. She was just eighteen when God took her—poor lass! From that moment luck changed for

the Giguets. The father lost heart for his work. He was so sulky people said he had the black sickness. To drown his grief he gave himself up to drinking brandy and was promptly changed. As to the mother, she began to dry up, like a tree struck at the roots. She never had a son, and killing and cleaning cows is not work fit for a woman's hands and shears. So she closed her stall and established herself at the Red Bull to sell cider. So that," he added with a loud laugh, "she spent half of her life feeding the world and the other half quenching its thirst. As for the people who frequent the house, they are like those who frequent taverns and inns, neither better nor worse. It is the same the world over, five bad faces to one good. When you hang a bush over your door, it is not for the purpose of keeping it closed. Moreover, when it is honestly earned, a rascal's sou is as good as the honest man's, isn't it, sir?"

So we went along, chatting. We had been crossing the moor for about an hour and the fog had ended by enveloping us completely with its diaphanous curtain. The moon filtered through its vapor a pale, uncertain light. As we rode along Maître Louis Tainnebouy had undone the leather straps which tied his cloak to the crupper of his horse and stretched its whole vast amplitude over himself and his mount, so that in the fog one might have thought the cavalier and horse one single creature, monstrous and strange. I had wrapped my own cloak round my body to shut out the pene-

trating humidity. If we had kept silent, we would have been like two shades such as Dante saw in the limbo of Purgatory. Our horses' tread was hardly heard on this moor which swallowed all sound. We went along, and the farther we went the more communicative we became and the more I had occasion to note the correctness and information, as the English call it, my companion, the cattle-raiser, showed in all matters. The intelligence of this rough fellow was as sane as his body. His knowledge was limited but exact. What had penetrated his excellent judgment had gotten there without the help of schools, by means of eyes and hands and experience. If he sometime showed original ways of feeling, called behind-the-times in this poor century of perpetual movement and cerebral gesture, it was not, as one might think, because of his peasant inferiority. On every plane of real life he would have beaten the most cunning if the plane were high enough. Half Norman and half Celt, for the closeness of Brittany and Normandy caused families to mix, he was the finest, most expressive type of that mixture of races. Despite the rustic sound—pardon the word—of his speech, he was full of fine sagacity and good sense. And what became him most was that he had always kept his place, that he was one with his life; he adjusted himself to his fate like a glove to the hand. Each thing should smell of its own fruit, said Henry IV, and he smelled of his; he conformed, without knowing it, to the precepts of the friend

of Michaud. It was only a piece of barley bread, but it was good.

All of a sudden, at one of those folds of earth we spoke of, Maître Tainnebouy's mare reared, and might have fallen if she had not been held by so strong a hand and so tight a rein. But when she went on, she limped. "Damn!" he said, and another oath I dare not write, and he hurled it forth with a round intonation like a blow on a bass drum, "there's Blanche limping now! May the devil take the damned moor! How could she have hurt herself on this smooth soil without a pebble? I must look into that, and at once! Pardon, sir," he added as he tumbled, rather than dismounted, from his horse. "I distrust a man who does not take care of his horse. Where would I be without Blanche, the best mare on the peninsula? For seven years I've outridden all the upstarts of Cotentin on her."

I had stopped, seeing him stop. But when I saw him take his foot out of the stirrup I thought affection for Blanche was turning his head. Indeed, though the night was not totally black and the moon drowned its pale light in the fog, one would have to be as night-seeing as all the cats that ever screeched at the door of a farm at midnight to see what there was in a horse's shoe at that hour. But quickly as he aroused my astonishment, he dissipated it as quickly. I saw him strike a light and draw a small stable lantern from the sleeve of his mantle and light it. Aided by its light, he picked

up the horse's hoofs one after the other and cried out that the front shoe was gone.

"And probably it has been gone a long time," he added as he repeated what he had observed, "for on this dusty soil a horse could lose all four shoes without its being noticed. Probably the horse pricked this foot; only," he went on, disquieted, "I see nothing."

He brought his lantern nearer and looked at the horse's hoof, as a master blacksmith might do.

"I can see nothing, neither blood nor swelling, and yet the poor beast can hardly touch her foot to the ground without suffering like the devil."

He took her by the edge of the bit and made her walk, drawing her along by him. But the mare, alert as she had been a moment ago, limped lamentably and there was every reason to fear she could not continue her way.

"Here we are in a nice fix," he said, in a tone of irritation I could understand and even began to share; "here we are in the middle of the moor, with a limping horse, without a living soul, or house, or anything, for two leagues around, and a good bit of road to do yet! The first smithy we will find is a quarter of a league from Haie-du-Puits. This is fun! What shall we do? The devil take me if I know! I don't want to put Blanche out to pasture for a fortnight, for the first of next month is All Saints' at Bayeux, a famous fair which lasts three days and has not its like from here to Chandeleur!"

And still armed with his lantern, he led along

the object of his complaint. But the lamed horse could hardly drag herself after.

"My faith, sir," he said finally, like a man who had come to a decision, "my advice now is that our companionship should end. It would be wise of you to leave me and go on alone, for the weather is not good and the night is as cold as if the air were full of needles. Perhaps you are in a hurry to arrive. Everyone has his own business and it is not fair for you to suffer because I am delayed. As for me, I have decided to go afoot to Haie-du-Puits. I shall get there Heaven knows when, truly—but sometime to-morrow morning. But I am accustomed to trouble. I've been in many a fix in my life. I've often passed the night under Garnetot or Aureville, deep in marsh mud, up to the waist, for the pleasure of shooting a few wild duck or teal. One or two leagues on the heath can't frighten me. All the more since Jeannine put double underwear on her man, like a good housewife who would rather put a slice of bacon on the grill and pour out a good pot of wine than make porridge, when he comes back from his journeys."

But I assured him that I would not leave him all alone in trouble when we had traveled so happily together, that my affairs, after all, were no more important than his, perhaps less so, and that a bit of fog had never frightened me.

"Wait," I said, "Maître Louis Tainnebouy, let us rest a moment. We'll breathe our horses and smoke a little to conjure away the acrid vapors of

night. Perhaps after a rest you can ride your horse again, since, as you say, you see neither wound nor swelling on her foot."

"I am much afraid," he said with a reflective air, throwing back his head, "that I shall not ride Blanche again to-night, if what I think is so."

"And what *do* you think, Maître Louis?" I asked, as I saw by the lantern's light a cloud come over his frank, fine features which usually shone with gaiety.

"My faith," he said, scratching his ear like a man in doubt, "I am not much inclined to tell you, sir, for you will laugh at me. But if it is true, why should I be silent? A laugh, after all, is only a laugh. Our curé is always telling us that it is good to make confession, and for my own part, I have noticed that when I have a weight on my mind and I tell it to Jeannine as my head lies on the pillow, I always feel relieved the next day. Moreover, you belong to the countryside and cannot have escaped hearing the things told by the graziers and farmers, as, for example, the secrets that certain people possess which we call sorcery hereabout."

"Certainly I have heard of them," I said. "Even a great deal in my childhood. I was cradled by such tales. But I thought all such secrets were lost."

"Lost, sir!" he said, reassured when he saw that I was not going to contest the fact, but only its existence now. "No, sir, those secrets have never been lost, and probably they never will be so long.

as we still have those good-for-nothing shepherds in the country, who come from no one knows where and go as they come; to whom we have to give bread to eat and flocks to herd if we do not wish all the beasts in the pasture to burst like rats fed on arsenic."

Maitre Tainnebouy was only telling me what I knew already. In the Peninsula of Cotentin (one does not know since when) there have been wandering shepherds, silent about their origin, who hire themselves out to the farmers about for a month or two, sometimes more, sometimes less. A species of gypsy shepherds, to whom the voice of the country people attributed occult powers and knowledge of secret magic. Where do they come from? Where are they going? They pass. Are they descendants of the Bohemian population dispersed over Europe in every direction during the Middle Ages? There is nothing to confirm this in their faces or the formation of their features. They are a blond people, with almost yellow hair, eyes grey or green, tall, retaining all the characteristics of the men who came in olden times from the north in their willow boats. By a singular anomaly these men, who according to my uncertain and trembling lights, ought to be a branch of the Normans modified by some unknown elements, have no keen taste for labor, no real foresight, and none of the practical genius of their race. They are dreamers and idlers, as useless for work as if they were sons of a burning sun which sends a dissolving idleness into men's

limbs with the heat of its rays. But wherever they come from, they have in them something which acts powerfully upon the imagination of an ignorant, indigenous people; they are vagabond and mysterious. Many a time efforts have been made to banish them from some parish. They went, but they came back. Sometimes solitary, sometimes in a troop of five or six, they wander hither and yon, given over to a leisure which they never fill but in one way, namely, leading the flocks along the back of the ditches or taking the cattle of some grazier from one fair to another. If by chance a farmer drives them out roughly or refuses to employ them, they never speak, bow their heads and go; a raised finger, as they turn back, is their sole and somber menace; and almost always some misfortune, mortality among the animals, or all the flowers of an apple tree dried up in a night, or corruption of the waters of the spring, follows the menace of the terrible and silently raised finger.

"And you think, then," I said to the Cotentin, "that they threw a spell over your mare, Maître Louis Tainnebouy?"

"That's my idea," he said reflectively, putting up his hand to his hat and pushing it over his ear; "that's my idea, sir. It is the truth and this is the reason. Yesterday at the market of Créance, in the tavern where I was, there was one of these miserable shepherds, pests of the countryside, who go about hiring themselves out to employers. He was crouching down in the ashes of the fireplace

and heating a cup of sweet cider while I was finishing a bargain with a grazier from Carentan. I had just settled the matter when my buyer told me he needed some one to take his oxen to Coutances, as he was going to see an uncle who was ill at Munéville-le-Bengar. Then the shepherd dawdling and drinking by the fireside proposed himself. 'Who are you that I should trust my animals to you?' asked the grazier. 'If Maître Tainnebouy knows you and will answer for you, I ask nothing better than to take you. Will you go surety for the fellow, Maître Louis?'"

"'My faith!' I said to the farmer, 'take him if you want him, but, like Pontius Pilate, I wash my hands of it. I don't want to run the risk of reproaches if anything happens to your beasts. "He who goes surety pays," says the proverb, and I go surety for no one I do not know.'"

"'Very well. Go find another employer!' the Carentin said, and that was all. Well, now I remember that the shepherd sent the devil of a look at me, from under the mantel of the fireplace, and I found him wandering about the side of the stable when I went to get Blanche to leave."

Nothing, indeed, could have been more natural than this tale of Maître Tainnebouy. To explain the accident to his horse there was no reason to look about for a malefactor. The shepherd, moved by resentment, had put something into the horse's shoe to wound her and take revenge upon her master, like that cruel Corsican child (called Na-

poleon) who pushed a cartridge with his finger into the ear of his father's favorite horse, when his father had punished him. But what proved to my Cotentin the demonic influence in the whole matter was that Blanche limped without apparent wound or reason. He had set his lantern down on the ground on a little mound that was there and filled his pipe as he looked at the mare, who, like all animals in pain, instinctively bent her intelligent head to the part that hurt. I had also dismounted from my horse and was rolling some leaves of Maryland tobacco into cigarettes. The cold became keener and keener.

"It is a pity," I said, glancing over the soil bare of everything, where the west wind had not driven a single branch of a tree, "that there is not a branch of dead wood such as you usually find scattered around the ground. We might light a little fire while the mare rests and warm the ends of our fingers."

"Ah yes, dead wood in this country," he said, "is like green wood. There is neither the one nor the other and we'll have to blow on our fingers to warm them. When the Chouans held their councils of war on bright nights, where we are now, they were obliged to bring along wood on a man's back which they had cut in some patriots' coppices."

The word Chouans thrown out casually as by a chance memory by this energetic, red-waistcoated man who had perhaps in his youth sent a shot over the hedge with them, evoked at once in my mind's

eye those phantoms of a former day before which the present reality paled and was effaced. I had just come from a town where the war of the Chouans had left a profound impression. No one, at the time I passed through, had forgotten the sublime episode which took place there in 1799, the audacious theft by twelve gentlemen, in a town full of enemy troops, of the famous Des Touches, that intrepid agent of princes, who was destined to be shot the next day. As one collects pinches of heroic dust I had gathered up all the details of this enterprise, unequalled in the annals of the most marvelous of human exploits. I gathered them where to my mind real history dwells, not from records or courts, but from oral history, the discourses, the living traditions which have lingered in the eyes and ears of a generation, and been left, warm from the breast that treasured them and the lips that told them, in the heart and memory of the following generation. Still under the spell of the impressions I had received, it was not astonishing that the word Chouans, pronounced in the external circumstances in which I was placed, re-awakened in me a once assuaged and powerful curiosity.

"Did you perhaps take part in the war of the Chouans?" I asked my companion, hoping I was going to have another page to add to the chronicles of that nocturnal war of the lower Norman Catérans, who assembled at an owl's hoot and whose war

signal was whistled between the two palms of the hands.

"No, no, sir," he answered after lighting his pipe, having adorned it with a little copper cap attached to a chain of the same metal tied to the stem. "No, no. I was too young then; a mite only fit to be spanked. But my father and my grandfather, who have always been easily led, took part in the war with their masters. One of my uncles even was wounded by two small shots in the crux of his arm, at the battle of la Fosse, near Saint-Lô, under M. de Frotté. He was a gay liver, my uncle, who played the violin like a miller and loved to set the girls to twirling. I have heard my uncle say that his wound did not prevent his playing the violin that same evening for his comrades in a barn not far from that place where in the morning they were so severely surprised. They expected to see the Blues in the night, but they were frolicking all the same, as if there were nothing in all the world but short petticoats and pretty legs. The loaded guns were only sleeping with one eye open in the corner of the barn. My mad, high-spirited uncle was holding his violin in his wounded and bleeding arm, playing gaily, like the old dancing master Pinabel on one of his best nights, despite the devil of a tune that his wound played, too. Do you know what happened, sir? His arm remained in the position it had taken to play that night for the rest of his life. He never could stretch it out again. It was

tied up in the slings of the Blues¹ in the attitude of a fiddler, that he had so loved in his youth, and to the day of his death, long afterward, he was known in the neighborhood by the name of Fiddler's Arm."

Delighted with so honorable a lineage which seemed to promise just such tales as I desired, I urged my Cotentin to tell me what he knew of the war in which his forbears had taken so active a part. I questioned, I urged, I tried to get some contribution from the memories of his childhood, the stories he must have heard told by the fire-side on winter evenings when he sat on his little stool between his father's legs to warm himself. But, oh, cruel disappointment, sad proof of the impotence of man to withstand the effect of time upon our hearts, Maître Louis Tainnebouy, son of a Chouan, nephew of the heroic Fiddler's Arm, wounded at Fosse and worthy of having opened the trench of Lerida, had almost forgotten, if he had ever known, everything that made his ancestors sacred in my eyes. Beyond a few well-known general facts, with which I was as familiar as he, he could not add one jot to my knowledge of an epoch as interesting in its own way as the epoch of 1745 in Scotland after the great misfortune of Culloden. It is well known that everything was not finished after Culloden and there remained in the highlands

¹ The Blues was the name given to the blue-coated soldiers of the Republic in the war of Chouannerie.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

many a partisan in kilt and tartan who continued sharpshooting without success, as the Chouans with their grey vests and handkerchiefs knotted round their hats continued it in Maine and Normandy after the Vendée was lost. What I hoped was that at least the memory of this war should leave some spark of his ancestor's passion in the soul of the nephew of Fiddler's Arm. But I must say, I breathed in vain upon this soul for the spark that I sought. Time wearing us away with a velvet hand has an even more maleficent daughter, light forgetfulness. Other interests, real though not so elevated, had soon seized all Maître Tainnebouy's activities. Politics for this tiller-of-fields and raiser-of-cattle was too much outside his province to be more than a secondary interest in life. In his eyes, the Chouans were mere alarm-clocks that went off too soon, and he was more impressed by a few maraudings, some hams hung in an old woman's fireplace, or a cask they had put on the floor of a cellar, than by the cause for which they knew how to die. With Maître Louis' good sense, unsuccessful Chouannerie was probably the mere folly of youth in his fathers. A conscript under the Empire, when he had to pay ten thousand francs to buy his freedom from the regular section of the battlefields, this memory aroused his indignation more against Boney (as the peasants say, taking away the poetry from that name which has sounded loudest on the clarions of fame) than the death of his uncle's general, that

Frotté with his white scarf, shot down by police guns with his safe-conduct on his heart!

Nevertheless, when he had smoked his pipe and looked once more at his mare's unshod hoof, he talked of starting on again, for better or worse, and reaching Haie-du-Puits as well as we could. The hour, on winged feet, had flown by despite our accidents and chatter, and night was silently advancing. The moon, now in its first quarter, had set. As Haly would have said in his *Love, The Painter*, it was dark as an oven and not a star showed the tip of its nose. We kept the lantern lit and its trembling rays gave the effect of a comet's tail in the cloven vapor of the fog. Soon it went out and we went afoot, as well as we could, leading our horses painfully by the bridles and seeing nothing at all. The situation in this sinister moor did not cease to be dangerous. But we had the serenity of gentlemen who had at hand means of defense and at heart the firm will to use them if occasion called. We went slowly, because of Blanche's bad foot and also because of the heavy boots we were dragging. When for a moment we were silent, what struck me most was the mournful muteness of the charged atmosphere. The immensity of space which we could no longer see revealed itself by the depth of its silence. This silence, heavy on our hearts and minds, was not broken a single time while crossing the moor, which seemed, as Maître Tainnebouy said, like the end of the world, except now and then by the sound of some heron's

wings, who had been asleep as he stood until our approach startled it into flight.

We could not tell anything about the time we were making in such complete darkness. Nevertheless, the hour struck by a bell seemed, to judge by its sound, to be near us. It was the first time we had heard it strike since we had been on the moor, so we must be approaching the boundary.

The clock which rang out with a shrill, clear sound marked midnight. We noticed it, for we had both counted the strokes and had not thought that it was so late. But the last stroke of midnight had hardly finished reverberating in our ears when from a farther and darker part of the horizon we heard not a clock, but a big bell ring out, somber, slow, deep-toned, and its powerful vibrations made us both stop to listen.

"Do you hear that, Maître Tainnebouy?" I said, moved, I must admit, by this sinister, brazen clamor in the night. "Why are they ringing at this hour? Can it be a fire?"

"No," he answered, "it is not fire. The tocsin sounds quicker and this is slow as death. Wait! Five strokes! there are six! seven! eight and nine! that is all. It will strike no more."

"But what is it," I asked, "a bell at this hour? It is very strange. Is it possible our ears are deceiving us?"

"Truly it is strange, but real!" he replied in a voice I would hardly have recognized had I not been sure that it was he, Maître Louis Tainnebouy,

walking beside me through night and fog. "It is the second time in my life I have heard it and the first time heralded such sorrow that I could never forget it. The night when I heard it, sir, some years ago, it was from the other side of Blanchelande, and at that hour my dear child, four years old, who seemed as strong as father and mother, died in his cradle of convulsions. What is going to happen to me this time?"

"But what is this bell of evil omen?" I asked my Cotentin, whose awe was moving me.

"Ah," he said, "it is the Blanchelande bell ringing for the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan's mass."

"A mass, Maître Tainnebouy!" I exclaimed. "Do you forget it is October and not Christmas in December, when they ring for midnight mass?"

"I know that very well, sir," he said in a grave tone. "But the mass of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan is no Christmas mass; it is a mass of the dead without responses or attendance, a horrible, terrible mass if what they say is true."

"But how do people know about it, if no one ever attends it, Maître Louis?"

"Ah, sir," said the farmer of Mont-de-Rauville, "this is how they know, so I have heard. The big portal of the original church of Blanchelande was the old portal of the abbey destroyed during the Revolution, and one can still see in its oaken panels the holes made by the cannon balls of the Blues. Well, I have heard it said that a number of people, crossing the cemetery to get to the yew-tree road

beside it were astonished to see lights streaming through the holes at that hour, when the church was locked, and they peeped there and saw the mass, and never felt any temptation to spy again, I tell you. Moreover, sir, neither of us is tipsy and we have just heard clearly the nine strokes which announce the *Introit*. Twenty years ago all Blanchelande heard them as we did, at various times, and there is no one hereabouts who would not tell you it is better to sleep and have evil dreams than to hear, from under the covers, the bells striking the midnight mass of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan."

"And who is this Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, Maître Tainnebouy," I asked, "who permits himself to celebrate mass at an hour which is irregular in all Catholic countries?"

"Do not jest, sir," replied Maître Louis. "There is nothing to laugh at in it. He was a creature who made others as miserable and criminal as he was. You were speaking of the Chouannerie a moment ago, sir. Well, it appears that he took part in it, priest though he was, for he was a monk in the Abbey of Blanchelande when Bishop Talaru, a dissolute fellow who repented afterward and died a saint in a far land, had his fling with the lords about here. The Abbé de la Croix-Jugan took part in the life they led then at Blanchelande, indulged in passions and vices which made him an object of horror to himself and others and a curse to God. I saw him once in 18— and I may say I saw the

face of one damned, still living but plunged up to his middle in hell."

Then I asked my traveling companion to tell me the story of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, and the good fellow did not wait to be urged to tell me what he knew. I have always been a great lover and taster of legends and popular superstitions which hide a profounder meaning than one thinks, unperceived by the shallow, who look for no more in such tales than interest for the imagination and a passing emotion. But if in the grazier's story there was an element of what one usually calls the marvelous (as if the nether side, the bottom of all human affairs, were not as marvelous and inexplicable as the things we deny because we have no explanation), there were also events produced by the shock of passion and inordinate affection, feelings which give any tale an immortal and poignant interest to that phoenix of immortal babblers, whose repetitions are always new, the human heart. The shepherds of whom Maître Tainnebouy had spoken, and to whom he attributed his horse's accident, played their rôle in the story. And though I cannot share all his opinions of them, I was far from denying them, for I have always believed by instinct as well as reflection in the two things upon which magic really rests. I mean in the tradition of certain secrets, as Maître Tainnebouy called them, which those initiated mysteriously pass on from hand to hand, from generation to generation, and in the intervention of occult and evil powers in

the struggles of humanity. I am upheld in this opinion by the history of all times and places, in all degrees of civilization, and what I respect infinitely more than all history, by the unquestionable attestation of the Roman Church, which has condemned in twenty different places of the acts of its councils, magic, sorcery, charms, not as vain and perniciously false, but as realities, clearly explained by its dogmas. As to the intervention of evil powers in the affairs of men, I have again the witness of the Church, and moreover I do not see that the happenings of the present day can permit the most recalcitrant to doubt. I beg pardon for these grave words, set here as a sort of frontispiece to the grazier's tale, told by night in a Cotentin moor. My companion told me this story as he knew it, but he only knew the surface. It was enough, however, to urge a mind like mine to penetrate its depth later. By nature I hate lies. I might have written, when we arrived at Haie-du-Puits while my memory was fresh and full of Maître Tainnebouy's words, all that he had told me, but I spent the time thinking it over, and that is the best I can say for myself. Now that several years have passed, bringing me all the elements that make the tale complete, I can tell it in my own way, not perhaps as worth while as that of my Cotentin grazier. May it give, at least to those who read it, the same luxury of dreams that I had in turning over the events and the personages, all the remainder of that night, when I sat, my elbows on an ugly

tavern table, between two dripping candles in front of the embers of a small fagot, in the depths of a silent and bleak little village, in which I knew not even a cat, as Maître Louis Tainnebouy would have said—an expression which, in parenthesis, I always thought far too gay to signify a matter as sad as isolation.

Chapter Three

IN THE year six of the French Republic a man was walking painfully by the last rays of the setting sun, which fell aslant across the forest of Cerisy. The dog days were well advanced, and although it was seven o'clock in the evening, the heat which had been insupportable throughout the day was overwhelming. The orb of the sun, red and sizzling as a panful of live coals, looked, as it leaned toward the horizon, like a broken cask of fire which had been half emptied upon the earth. There was no wind in the air and in the stale atmosphere no tree moved from trunk to tip. To borrow an energetic and colloquial expression from Maître Tainnebouy (whom I shall often recall in this tale) "you stewed in your own juice." The man who advanced along the edge of the forest appeared broken by fatigue. He had probably walked since morning and on him was heaped all the heavy oppression of the long and devastating day. Whatever he might be in the eyes of one accustomed to the doings of this epoch, noticing this unknown, he was not at any rate an ordinary traveler, cautiously armed to cross this forest, known to be so dangerous that public vehicles never passed through it without an escort of soldiers. By his general look, his costume, and that indescribable

something which emerges like a voice from the mute appearance of a man, he was in easy circumstances, or if one could not assert, at least one suspected that he was, and it was astonishing to see him wandering alone at this hour of the evening while the sun was still so high. In short, he must have been a Chouan! His clothes were of the grey of an owl's plumage, the color that the Chouans adopted to mislead the eye and the rifles of spies when, by the light of the moon or in darkness, they lined themselves along an old wall or lay flat in a ditch like a mound of dust which the wind had swept together. These very simple garments were cut almost like those I had seen on Maître Tainnebouy. Only in the place of the boots without feet of the grazier, the unknown wore gaiters of fawn-colored leather which came up to his knees, and his big hat with its barrel-top pulled down, almost covered his face entirely.

According to the usage of these thicket guerillas, who recognized one another by mysterious war names like commands, in order to give the enemy none but anonymous prisoners, nothing in the get-up of the unknown indicated whether he was a commander or a plain soldier. A belt of the same leather as his gaiters held two pistols and a strong hunting knife, and he held a blunderbuss in his right hand. Ordinarily the Chouans, who never made an expedition except at night, did not show themselves along the roads with their arms by day.

But as no one knew the state of the country better than they, and as they could say how many travelers and vehicles would pass on such a road at such an hour, this doubtless gave this Chouan, if he was one, his security. The diligence with its escort of soldiers had passed in a flood of dust at about five o'clock, the accustomed hour. He was only exposed then to meeting a few wagons hitched up to their four oxen or their two horses, or some farmers and their wives riding a horseback and coming tranquilly back from the neighboring markets. That was about all. The roads in no wise resembled those of to-day; they were not, as now, incessantly traversed by elegant and rapid carriages. Terrified by the civil war, the country no longer had that incessant communication which proves the circulation of a powerful life. The castles, pride of hospitable France, were in ruins or abandoned. There was no luxury. There were no carriages except public carriages. When one turns back in thought to this curious epoch one remembers the sensation caused, even in Paris, by the famous white coach of M. de Talleyrand, the first, I believe, which had appeared since the Revolution. However, to return to our traveler, he would only have had to make a light leap into the forest at the first suspicious noise or the first sight of evil omen.

But if he had thought of all that, calculated it, there was no sign of it. When caution and defiance govern even the greatest of men it is visible in their very walk and even the slightest of their move-

ments. Now the Chouan who was dragging himself along between the two borders of the forest of Cerisy, leaning on his blunderbuss as a beggar leans on his forged and iron-shod staff, showed not only the slowness of frightful fatigue, but complete indifference to all danger near or distant. He did not even search the thicket with a glance. He did not stretch his neck to listen to the noise of horses in the distance. He advanced carelessly as if unconscious of his own audacity. In fact, he was unconscious of it. The obsession of cruel thought, the exhaustion of immense fatigue, prevented his feeling the throb of danger dear to men of courage. And so he was deliberately committing a great imprudence. He stopped and sat down on the edge of the ditch which separated the wood from the road, took off his hat and threw it on the grass, like a man overcome by heat who wishes to breathe.

Any who saw him at this moment would have understood his indifference to all possible dangers even had they been gathered all round him and hidden behind every tree of the forest which grew along the borders of the road. Free of his big hat, his face, which he no longer hid, told more of him than the most eloquent words could. Never, perhaps, since Niobe had the sun lightened so poignant an image of despair. The most horrible of all life's agonies had imprinted its last anguish there. The face of the unknown, beautiful, though marked by a fatal scar, seemed to be carved out of green marble, it was so pale! This bruised and greenish

pallor stood out boldly under the band which bound his temples, for he wore a knotted handkerchief around his head like all the Chouans, who slept under the open sky at night, and this handkerchief, whose corners hung behind his ears, was a flame-colored foulard, contraband stuff, such as they were just beginning to export from Jersey to the coast of France. Seen underneath this band of brilliant color, the eyes of the Chouan, marked by two circles black as ink, so that the white seemed whiter by contrast, shone with that deep and exasperated fire which the sinister idea of suicide lights in human eyes. They were truly terrible. To anyone who knew physiognomy it was evident that this man was going to kill himself. In all probability he was one of those who had had part in a battle of the Republican troops and the Chouans which had taken place in the neighborhood of Saint-Lô that same morning; one of the vanquished of the Fosse, which was the grave of more than one brave man and the last hope of the king's chasseurs. His face bore the sinister light of a disaster greater than the misfortune of a single man. Half reared on his side, like a courageous wolf beaten down, this lonely man showed an incomparable grandeur there in the dust of the ditch: the grandeur of a supreme moment. He turned a slow proud look toward the evening sun, which like a tender executioner seemed to count with melancholy the few last instants of life which remained to him; and his eyes, which he was about to close forever, struggled without

softening with the ruby disk of that dazzling star, as if he were asking that flaming dial if indeed the hour had sounded in which he had sworn in his soul that he would cease to breathe. Who knows? It may have been just the same hour when the heroic violinist, Fiddler's Arm, opened so gaily in the threshing floor of the barn that intrepid ball of wounded and refugees which he kept up all one night with a broken arm. Only for those joyous fellows of eternal hope and for him the hour had not the same meaning. He did not accept defeat so lightly. To judge by the depth of his sorrow, he must have been one of the highest commanders of the party, for a man does not so identify himself with a lost cause as to perish with it unless he is bound by the chain of a commander. Resolute to share its destiny, he had opened his waistcoat, tightly buttoned over his chest, and from underneath the shirt glued to his skin by clots of coagulated blood he had taken out a hidden parchment which doubtless held important instructions, and having torn it up with his teeth like a cartridge, he ate every scrap. In his sublime preoccupation he never lowered his eye to the wound in his breast, which had begun to bleed again. When on the evening of the Battle of the Thirty,¹ Beaumanoir

¹ A battle which was one of the most salient episodes of the war of Brittany. It took place at Ploermel, 1351, when thirty French Cavaliers, partisans of Charles de Blois under the leadership of Beaumanoir, vanquished thirty English Cavaliers, partisans of Jean de Montfort.—TRANSLATOR'S

NOTE.

"Drink-Your-Own-Blood" drank his to quench his thirst, it was certainly fine, nor has history forgotten that great and savage spectacle; but it was perhaps less imposing than this solitary Chouan, of whom an ungrateful and ignorant history never speaks, who before his death chewed and swallowed dispatches drenched in his own blood the better to hide and bury them with him.

And when he had fulfilled this duty with careful fidelity, when there remained nothing of the devoured parchment between his fingers but the big purple wax seal which had closed it, and which he had respected, an idea, sad as last hope, crossed his intrepid spirit. It was a thing both strange and touching! He contemplated it dreamily and with adoration and wet it with tears of a limitless love, this seal with its deep imprint, as if he wished to engrave once more on his soul the portrait of an idolized mistress. Is there anything more moving than such troubled lions whose tears falling from fierce eyes roll down their manes like the dew of night upon the fleece of Gideon? And nevertheless there was no portrait imprinted upon this hardened wax. It was only the escutcheon which usually sealed the dispatches of the House of Bourbon. It was simply the escutcheon of the monarchy, the three lilies beautiful as lance-heads with which France had been crowned so many centuries and which its rebel brow no longer wanted. In the eyes of this Chouan, this sign was the holy emblem of the cause for which he had fought in vain. He

kissed it several times as Bayard dying kissed the cross of his sword. But if the passion of his kisses was as pious as that of the knight without reproach, it was also more desolate, for the cross spoke of hope and the arms of France did so no longer. When he had appeased the tenderness of his last hour, he who had not upon his sword the sign of the divine martyr who ordered even heroes to submit and suffer, he seized his blunderbuss beside him, hot still from the many deaths it had caused that morning, and silent and without a word or a sigh trembling upon his lips bronzed by the powder of cartridges, he leaned the gun against his face and pushed the trigger with his foot. The shot went off. The forest of Cerisy repeated the detonation with blasts which reverberated and rebounded with bellowing echoes. The sun had disappeared. Both had fallen at the same hour, one from life, the other from the horizon.

It was a lovely evening. The air was silent again and the breeze which rises when the sun goes down, as a ball whistles when it has passed, began gently to shake the leaves of the forest and to caress with its breath the mutilated brow of the suicide. A good woman, wandering there and picking up fagots, slowly climbed the ditch which a creature of God had filled with his clay. Absorbed in her work, deaf, perhaps, or if she had heard the resounding blunderbuss, having mistaken it for the gun of some late hunter, she stumbled by a turn of her sabot over the body of the warrior. She was fright-

ened at first, as was natural, by this corpse, but she had a son among the Chouans. More mother than woman, she ended by bending her old head over the body of the disfigured Chouan and put her hand upon his heart. Who would have believed it? It was still beating! Then the old woman hesitated no longer. With a restless eye she glanced along the road, the thicket, the clearing; but seeing no one anywhere and night coming on, she raised the Chouan on her back, despite her age, like a stolen fagot and carried him into her hut near the border of the wood. Having put him to bed in her miserable cot, she bathed him all night by the smoky light of her oil lamp, washing the horrible wounds of that head with its broken bones and hanging flesh. The face of the suicide was crossed and lined with inextricable furrows of wounds. The rifle had had five or six balls in it and coming from the barrel they had radiated in divers directions and it was owing to this without doubt that the Chouan had not been killed on the spot. Nevertheless, the good woman soothed as well as she could this frightful bleeding mummy which had lost all human semblance. Expert in misery, but with a soul stronger than any disgust, she devoted herself to this task of pity which God had sent her at the close of day as He did to the good Samaritan on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. She was a real Christian, a woman belonging to a time very different from our own. She had kept a woodcutter's faith which makes virtue efficacious, urges good works and sends the heart's charity into the muscles of the hands.

She never imagined that the man who was the object of her pious solicitude had turned against himself with impious violence. A mark that she had found upon the man would have turned away the horror of this thought even if she had been able to conceive it. A Royalist, because she honored God, she never doubted that the balls of the Blues had made the wounds which she was healing, and this was a reason the more for attending them with a warmer and tenderer care. You should have seen this nurse of the suffering! When she had finished sponging and bathing these wounds and tying them up with the rags of her old chemises torn in pieces, she knelt down before an image of the Virgin and prayed for the Chouan rent by pain. Did the Virgin Mother hear her? It is certain that the wounded man did not die.

About ten days had passed since Marie Hecquet (for that is the name of the good woman) had picked up the dying Chouan. Isolated on the edge of a solitary forest, without any neighbors, she was not exposed to any awkward or hostile questions. On this score at least she was safe. But as in time of civil trouble one can never be too prudent, she had buried the arms and the clothes of the Chouan in the corner of her hut, ready, if the Blues passed, to deceive them and to tell them that the wounded man who was dying there was her son. She did not fear any noble imprudence from him, for his wounds did not permit him to speak a single word.

"Even if the Blues," she thought, "had seen him

sometime in the smoke of powder or face to face in battle, they would certainly never recognize him; for his mother, his own mother, if this man still had one, would not recognize him."

Everything seemed favorable to this work of pious charity, but the box of destiny is more perfidious than Pandora's. You think you have emptied it of all the evils of life, and then see that it has a double bottom and it is still full.

It was an evening like that of the day of the suicide—a long, orange-tinted, silent evening. Marie Hecquet, at the threshold of her open door, through which the forest air came in to the wounded man, bearing life in its perfumed breath, was washing in the tub in front of her the bloody linen of some bandages. Like all peasants, so easily heroic when they have a heart, like all the Marthas of the Gospel who act, but in whom action never stifles thought, any more than labor in the fields stifles and breaks the child beneath the breast, Mother Hecquet was watching her invalid, although her hands were plunged in the bloody brew of soap suds and she appeared absorbed in what she was doing. A little unseen bell began to sound quite near; it was not the feeble bell of one of the mossy hermit chapels built formerly in the depths of the woods, for the churches were not yet reopened. It was a little bell in some sabot-maker's hut which marked the hours and the end of labor and the day. But for Marie Hecquet, this woman of olden times, firm of heart in the religion of her fathers

and the memories of her cradle, seven o'clock, striking no matter where, had always been the sacred hour, sounded formerly by bells now mute in the land, and it invited to evening prayer. As soon as she heard it she dropped the linen that she was wringing out and was about to hang on the neighboring nut tree, to the bottom of the tub and, lifting her old wet hand to a brow as yellow as box in the eyes of men, but pure as gold in the eyes of God, she began, noble and good woman that she was, to recite the Angelus.

But what ought to save us sometimes brings ruin. This sign of the cross was her misfortune.

Five Blues coming silently out of the opposite forest had stopped on the edge of the road. Leaning on their guns, alert, silent, their eyes turning in every direction along the road, they spied here and there like dogs about to beat the bush and raise their game. And their prey was man. They were hunting Chouans. They were hoping to catch, after the recent defeat, some of the bold partisans scattered over the country. For some minutes they had been showing one another by signs the open hut of Mother Hecquet, for the sun was reddening its clay and the poor woman washing at the threshold. When she raised her body, bent over her work to make the sign of redemption, the sign which they had been taught to curse, they no longer doubted that she was a Chouan, and they advanced upon her, crying out.

"Alas, they are *chauffeurs*,"¹ she said. "Jesus have pity upon us!"

"Brigand," said the chief of the troop, "we saw you murmuring your prayer. You must have Chouans hidden in your kennel."

"Only my dying son," she said, "who was wounded in the head as he came home from hunting." And she followed them, pale and trembling, for they had rushed into the house like a band of savages.

They went straight to the bed and with their brutal hands uncovered the wounded man devoured by fever, and started back when they saw that hideous, enormous swollen head disfigured by bandages and dried blood.

"He, your son!" said the one who had spoken first. "For your son he has very white hands," he added, lifting up with the scabbard of his saber one of the Chouan's hands which hung outside the bed. "By my steel and flint, old woman, you lie! This is a wounded man from the Fosse who dragged himself here after the rout. Why didn't you let him die? You deserve to be shot down on the instant or that my comrades and I should roast your broom handles of legs with the planks of your tub. To pick up such a beast! It is lucky for your skin that the brigand is devilishly ill. Apparently our comrades managed that very well. By the heads of a thousand kings! What a slaughtered boar's head!

¹ *Chauffeurs* was the name of the brigands who heated and burned the feet of their victims to make them give up their secrets.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

He isn't worth the balls in the barrels of our guns. We will spare our powder and let him die by himself. We have our sabers, indeed, but no one shall say that we came here to shorten his sufferings by a single blow. Hell, no! Come here, old goat, and give us something to drink! Have you any cider? Let us drink to the Republic while we watch that brigand dying."

The unhappy Marie Hecquet felt her nails blacken with terror at these words, but, repressing all emotion, she went and drew from a little cask at the side of the bed the cider the Blue demanded. She put it in a copper pot, with some Monroc mugs, her humble dishes, on a table which the ax had hardly shaped. These five soldiers of the Republic seated themselves on the benches which usually surround the poorest of Norman tables, and as the jug circulated they filled their mugs a dozen times. They little cared that they would leave the old woman dry of provisions; and she, all too glad to see their attention turned aside at this price, went and came in the hut, sometimes sweeping the floor, sometimes brightening the dying fire, in order, like Baucis, to warm the water necessary for the dressing of the wounds in the evening, when the terrible guests should have departed. The conversation of the Blues, which became more and more excited as they talked and drank, augmented Marie Hecquet's first fears. Mixed in it from time to time were the sinister names of Rossignol and Pierrot, Pierrot above all, that Cacus whose ferocities had

the grandeur of his strength, and who amused himself by breaking the backs of his prisoners over his knee as he might break the branches of a tree. Such talk was indeed worthy, for that matter, of soldiers excited as they were by fanaticism and the tension of civil war; the character of which is pitiless like whatever involves convictions. Depraved by implacable wars, these five Blues were not like the noble soldiers of Hoche or of Marceau, who seemed animated by the souls of their generals. All wine has its dregs and every army its brutes. They were those horrible brutes which one finds in the slums of every war, belonging to that inevitable race of jackals who come to sully the blood they lap up after the lions have passed. In a word, they were laggards belonging to those bands of *chauffeurs* so feared in the west, who by the savagery of their barbarism called down, it must be admitted, cruel reprisals. Marie Hecquet had often heard these bandits spoken of by travelers and farmers. She even remembered one frightful story her son, a sabot-maker in the forest, who came to see her between two nocturnal expeditions, had told her recently with all a Chouan's indignation of a sickened soul. It was the story of that lord of Pontécoulant, I believe, who one morning at dawn had been found with his head cut off and laid in a chamber pot—a filthy and insulting joke—on one of the eastern window-sills of his devastated palace.¹

Such tales, such memories, threw their reflections

¹ This is an historic fact.—AUTHOR'S NOTE.

upon these sinister Blues and made her shiver, though she was neither feeble nor foolish, at every atrocious joke of these men drinking with the joy of cannibals, near the Chouan's bed of torture. "Perhaps they are the assassins of Pontécoulant," she thought. Night was coming on. Whether it was the influence of its shadows and darkness, for night hatches out crimes from evil hearts, or whether it was the heat of drunkenness, or perhaps even the odious remorse which rises in perverse souls when they have tarried in the accomplishment of evil or left some horrible design unfulfilled, who knows?—but by degrees, as night fell blacker on the hut, thoughts of vengeance and of blood seized these Blues again and rose in their hearts. The Chouan, turning on his cot, was dying without even being able to give out a cry of pain. The bandages which tied his face forced a heavy silence like a wall upon his mouth. He did not murmur, but his irregular breathing, that low and steady rattle sounding from the corner of the dark hut, incessant, eternal, sinister, broken by the loud voices and bursts of laughter of the Blues, doubtless suggested to them an enemy lying on the ground, a last bite at the heel such as vanquished pain imprints at times, with its dying mouth, upon the brutal foot of victory.

"That Chouan bores me with his rattle," said the chief of the five, "and I am tempted to send him to all the devils before I leave!"

"Done!" said another, perhaps the most repulsive

of the troop. A livid broken head, with the temples of a viper emerging from an enormous lees-of-wine-colored cravat, turned at this moment into a valise, since it contained a change of shirt stolen the day before from a priest—this man was horrible and clownish at once. “Done, Sergeant,” he repeated in a thick voice. “You are talking like a man now. Let us kill this Chouan after this mug, for we can’t stay drinking here until morning. But how shall we kill him? You said just now, Citizen Sergeant, that the torch-bearers of Hell’s Brigade did not come here to cut short the sufferings of a Chouan who is already having a foretaste of hell if there is one. We must invent an agony which will give him all of hell before the final blow.”

“By the devil and his horns you are right, you Thief’s Whistle.” For this Blue really had a nose of exactly that beautiful form, hence his war nickname.

“We must kill, as Captain Morisset would say, *with real intelligence*. I therefore form you into council of war, citizens, to deliberate upon the sort of death that we are to inflict upon this brigand!”

They filled their five mugs as if to get inspiration.

The unfortunate Marie Hecquet wished to intervene in the name of all natural feeling. With words of fire and with tears she implored these five men who were deaf to all pity. One might have thought from what she said that she really was the mother of the wounded man, she was so pathetic in speech,

in action, in her manner of pleading; but it was all in vain.

"Shut up, you brigand!" said one of them, giving her a blow across the back with the butt of his gun.

"Get rid of the old witch, Sans-Façon," went on the sergeant, "and make a gag with the handle of your sword so that she can no longer trouble this council of war with her cries!"

But this woman of the people who did not fear pain and knew, as they say, how to turn her hand to anything, had a last movement of energy, betrayed, alas! by age. When she saw the Blue coming toward her she tried to seize a brand lit in the fire to defend herself from the outrageous aggression, but before she could seize the weapon which she sought he had already knocked her down and held her.

"Now, citizens," said the sergeant, "let us deliberate."

And they deliberated. Ten different sorts of death were proposed; ten frightful varieties of martyrdom.

The pen refuses to write down the chaos of thoughts of these delirious executioners and their frightful propositions which mixed and contradicted one another. The chief of the bandits was seized by a disgust of the hideous clamor and anarchy of his council, where, as in every council, each one wished his advice to prevail.

"We are all imbeciles!" he cried, closing the discussion by a blow of his fist upon the table. "All

considered, I never advised killing this Chouan, who in the state he is in would be only too glad to die. But this is my farewell to the damned carcass. Look!"

He walked up to the Chouan's bed and, seizing the bandages of his face with his nails, he tore them off with such force that they cracked, broke, carrying away lumps and pieces of living flesh from the wounds which had just begun to close. It could be heard rather than seen, for night had fallen entirely, and it was so frightful to hear that Marie Hecquet fainted away.

A hoarse roar, which was not even human, came not from the chest of the wounded man, but from the very depths of his loins. It was the power of life, invaded by pain in its last lair, uttering a last cry.

"And now," said the execrable sergeant of Hell's Brigade, "salute the Chouan with fire!"

And all five took red coals from the fireplace and strewed them on that face which was no longer a face. The fire was extinguished in blood and the red coals disappeared into the wounds as if they had thrown it into a sieve.

"Let him live now if he can live," said the sergeant, "and let the old woman do her washing if she wants. Leave them there to all the devils. Night has come, and you can hardly see your fist in front of you since we have taken the fire to cook the broiled steak of this Chouan. We must go. Shoulder arms, comrades, and advance!"

And so they went. What happened after their departure? Such a detail does not matter to this story. We know only that the disfigured Chouan did not die. The radiation of the blunderbuss's balls had saved his life. The swelling of his face which hid his eyes when the Blues powdered his wounds with fire saved him from blindness.¹ After the war of Chouannerie, when they reopened the churches, he was seen one day standing in a stall, at vespers in Blanchelande, enveloped in a black hood. It was the former monk of the devastated abbey, the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan.

¹ The facts told here happened to one of the chiefs of the Chouans, a relative of him who writes these lines; nor are these the sole instances in the war of Chouannerie which recall by their atrocity the Écorcheurs, the Peasants' War in 1525, etc. Despite the impostures of civilizations there is at the heart of man an eternal barbarism. Recent events (December, 1851) have shown us that men are ever ready to recommence past horrors. Less than ever would it be permissible to veil the picture or enfeeble its terrors. These things belong to history and are a sacred legacy.—AUTHOR'S NOTE.

Chapter Four

IT WAS precisely on this day, at the vesper service which was later so fatal to her, that a woman, still young, attended church in one of the pews nearest to the choir. As she lived at some distance, she arrived late. Nor must we forget to say that it was Advent, that time of waiting for the Church steeped in penitence, which harmonizes so well with the sadness of winter. It seems that having at hand all the poetry to express all the grandeur of truth, the church with profound insight combined the aspect of its ceremonies with the aspect of the seasons, as is inevitable for the human imagination. The purple of the Church at this season is quenched in the violet of its ornaments, emblem of the gravity of its hope. Because of the season and the late hour, the church of Blanchelande had begun to veil itself in grey tints, the darker for the mysterious and somber reflections of the stained-glass windows when the sun no longer lightens them with its rays. These windows, mingled with common windowpanes blackened by time, remained from the destroyed abbey. The woman of whom I speak joined in a low voice the psalmody of the priests. Her prayer-book of red morocco with gilt edges, printed at Coutances, approved and passed by Monseignor ———, first bishop of this

See after the Revolution, showed by its rather barbaric costliness that she was not a peasant, or if one, very rich despite the fact that her costume was much the same as that of most of the women along the nave. She wore a small mantle, or pelisse, light, with a long nap, and a cape lined with the same color fell over her shoulders; on her head she wore the traditional headdress of the girls of the Conquest, a white cap, very high, in the form of the crest of a helmet, of which the chignon of flaxen hair, boldly brushed over, formed the mane. This woman's husband was one of those large proprietors of Blanchelande and Lessay who had bought up government lands, an active, industrious man, of the kind who springs up amid the ruins made by revolutions like gilly-flowers, though less pure, in the crevices of crumbled walls. One of those fellows who fish well in troubled waters, even if they do not trouble them to fish the better. Formerly, when she was a young girl, this woman was named Jeanne-Madelaine de Feuardent, a noble name revered in all the countryside; but since her marriage, that is to say for ten years, she had been known as Jeanne Le Hardouey, or to use the idiom of the countryside, as Maître Thomas le Hardouey's woman. Every one of God's Sundays saw her attending the services of the day, seated by the door of her pew opening upon the aisle of the nave, the place of honor which permitted her to see the procession better as it passed. She was not at all

pietistic, but she had been religiously brought up, and her habits were religious. She knew, therefore, all the faces, more or less venerable, of the parochial clergy and of the neighboring churches, which sometimes sent some of their priests to preach at Blanchelande or to say mass, by way of politeness from one church to another.

This will explain her astonishment when that day, lifting her eyes from her red morocco prayer book, she perceived a tall priest, whom she would certainly not have forgotten had she ever seen him before, his face half hidden by a cowl drawn down; he went up to one of the choir stalls opposite her, and stood there in an attitude of somber pride which the religion of which he was a minister had never broken. They were celebrating the second Sunday in Advent, and at the moment when he advanced from the door of the sacristy, dragging the cloak of his hood across the flags and going slowly up to his stall, a voice sang the words of the anthem of the day: *et statim veniet dominator*. Jeanne Le Hardouey had the translation of these words in her prayer book, printed in two columns, and she could not help applying them to this unknown priest with his strangely dominating air.

She turned and asked Nônon Cocouan, the dress-maker, who was kneeling on the bench behind hers, if she knew this priest, whom she pointed out as he stood there leaning against the closed stall. But Nônon Cocouan, although very well informed as to the matters and the personnel of the church of

Blanchelande, for which she worked, looked around and questioned in vain, whispering to two or three gossips in the neighboring benches; she could get nothing but negations and shakings of the head and was obliged to admit to Jeanne that neither she nor anyone else in the church knew the priest in question.

Nônon was one of those old maids between thirty-five and forty, nearer forty than thirty-five, who had been beautiful and rather proud, who had inspired love without returning it, and who, if they ever felt it, hid it carefully in their hearts, for it was for some one more highly placed than they whom they "could not have," as the popular expression says with so much melancholy; indeed, one of those beautiful apples, past their prime, which have, alas! lost the firm and fresh texture of white and pink flesh, but which like the medlar, bitten by frost, still keep a sweet savor into the very winter of life.

Like all the pious who have missed joy and the tenderness of maternity, and who no longer hide themselves from the love of God as they once hid themselves from the love of a man, Nônon Coucouan had an ardent soul and carried over into the practices of her life the restrained flame of an unappeased youth. Malicious jesters and impious gossips in Blanchelande said she was a confessional-haunter. What did they understand of that mystic wild rose whose burning depths would remain ever hidden from them?

Nevertheless, I am forced to admit, despite my lively sympathy for devout old maids—a species of woman who has always been treated with an injustice as superficial as it is revolting—Nônon Cocouan had the pettiness, the puerilities, the defects of her type. She loved the priests not only as ministers, but as persons. She loved to be occupied with them and their affairs. She idolized them. It was a pure idolatry, but often ridiculous and slightly out of place. Jeanne Le Hardouey had done right in turning to her to ask the name of the imposing priest who had so struck her. No one in all Blanchelande would know who he was if Nônon Cocouan did not know. Jeanne Le Hardouey accepted her ignorance. Her curiosity was not of the same nature as Nônon's. These two women were too different in too many ways to feel alike about such matters. Jeanne's curiosity was determined by things which came as much from her destiny as from her character. And, moreover, at this moment, her interest and her curiosity were not of so great an intensity that she could not wait for a favorable occasion to satisfy it. She began to follow again and sing the vespers; but involuntarily, from time to time, her eyes turned toward the proud lines of that black cowl, that man upright and immovable in the closed stall about whom the shadow of the vaults, increasing every moment, fell ever more heavily.

Nevertheless, perhaps because of the recent reopening of the churches, there was Benediction that

Sunday at the church of Blanchelande and, as usual when vespers were said, they began to crown this touching service of evening, whose psalms cradle religious souls upon a flood of divine emotions, with the splendour of the Benediction. The candles, extinguished after the *Magnificat*, were relighted. The hymn broke forth from all throats, the incense rolled in smoke under the vaults of the choir, and the procession soon advanced like a living spiral of gold and fire down the nave, to turn again around the church with its forest of columns. Nothing is so beautiful as this solemn instant in the Catholic ceremonies when the priests, clothed in their white surplices and dazzling copes, march slowly, preceding the canopy, and follow the silver cross which the candles below light up, so that it cuts the shadow of the vaults in which it seems to swim, as with its brightness the cross eighteen centuries ago broke the shadows which covered the world.

But Benediction this evening was the more beautiful in the church of Blanchelande to these prostrate peasants, because such a spectacle had long been lacking to their faith. At this epoch, doubtless, there must have been real ecstasy for believing souls in the resuscitated contemplation of these ancient ceremonies coming back to flaunt their venerated pomps in temples too long closed, when they had not been profaned; such impressions must sleep now in the coffins with our fathers, but we understand how powerful and profound they must have been. Jeanne Le Hardouey felt these emotions as

they would have been felt by a woman more pious than she, for there are moments when faith rises even in the most lukewarm and the coldest like a dazzling bubble, often only to fall again. She was on her knees like all the others when the procession advanced flaming across the shadows of the nave. The priests filed by, one by one, chanting the traditional hymns, a candle in one hand and a book of plain-song in the other; the purple canopy with its white plumes thrown back shone through the distance. Jeanne watched all the priests as they passed beside her pew, and waited with an impatience, the secret of which she could not fathom, for the stranger who had made such an impression. Probably as a stranger they wanted to do him honor, for he walked last of all, a little in front of the deacons in dalmatics, who immediately preceded the priest carrying the blessed sacrament sheltered by the canopy. He was the only one of all these splendid priests who had not changed his costume at the end of vespers. He had kept on his cloak and his austere black cowl, and he came along, silent among those who sang, with an almost secular majesty, so haughty was it spreading about his imperious figure. He had a book in his left hand, falling negligently toward the ground among the folds of his cloak, and in his right he held a candle, his arm outstretched as if he were trying to keep the light from his face. Good Heavens! Was he conscious of the horror? But if he had this consciousness, it was not for him, but for others.

As for him, beneath this mask of scars he kept a soul on which, as on his torn face, there was not room for another wound. Jeanne was afraid, she admitted it afterward, when she saw this terrible head framed in a black cowl; or rather, no, she was not afraid; she felt a shiver, a sort of vertigo, a cruel astonishment which hurt like the bite of steel. Indeed, she had a nameless sensation produced by this face which was also a nameless thing.

For the rest, she felt more than anyone in the church of Blanchelande, her soul being different from other souls, what all the congregation felt in different degrees. The impression was so profound that, except for the blessed Sacrament which threw its rays like the sun on all these bowed brows and overwhelmed them with glory, it would have risen in murmuring. The procession took a long time to turn its moving splendor about the church, leaving behind a track of shadow blacker than that which fled in front of the torches. When it went down the great aisle to enter the choir, Jeanne-Madelaine tried to brace and assert herself against the frightful sensation which the priest in the cowl had made upon her. She turned three-quarters round to see him pass again. He passed in the pageant, mute, impassible in his marble pose, and the second glance which she threw upon him deepened the powerful impression of shock upon her soul which the first one had left. Despite the solemnity of the ceremony, despite the festive songs and the sheaves of

light that flared up from the choir, detachment or a feeling of edifying thought could no longer enter the troubled soul of Jeanne Le Hardouey. Instead of joining in the songs of the faithful, or taking refuge in prayer, she searched above the scarlet-draped shoulders of the confraternity of the Holy Sacrament who followed the canopy and entered the choir, above the smoking fires of the twisted yellow wax candles which vibrated like the fire of torches in the air set in motion by voices; the unknown priest in his black cowl, kneeling near the celebrant on the steps of the high altar, remained rigid like a statue of *Scorn of Life*, carved for a tomb. To the eyes of a soul like Jeanne's this strange priest seemed to be avenging himself for the horror of his wounds by a face of such sublime pride that one was overwhelmed by it as by great beauty. Jeanne did not know what was the matter, but she succumbed to a fascination full of anguish. When the celebrant went up the steps and, taking the Blessed Sacrament in his gloved hands, turned toward the congregation to bless it, at this supreme moment Jeanne forgot to bow her head. She was dreaming! She asked what could have happened to a human creature to have a face so engraved with agony, and what he could have in his soul to bear it with such pride. She remained absorbed in her revery after the Benediction, so that she did not perceive that the service was over. She did not hear the sabots of the diminishing crowd as it went out by the two lateral doors, nor did she see the

empty church darkening little by little in the smoke of the extinguished candles and the arches of the vaulting disappearing in a sea of silence and obscurity.

"How mad I am to stay here!" she said, roused suddenly from her dream by the noise of the chain of the choir lamp which the sacristan had just pulled down to fill it with oil for the coming week. She took a little key, opened a drawer under her fold-stool, and put away her prayer book. She realized that she was late, seeing the church so dark, and she rose up when the noise of a sabot made her turn her head, and she saw Nônon Cocouan, who had gone out before everyone else but was returning and coming straight to her.

"I know who he is, my dear lady," said Nônon Cocouan with the important and intimate manner of gossips. Nor is this an insult, for gossips, after all, are the minor poetesses who love tales, unveiled mysteries, lying exaggerations, the eternal ailment of all poetry. They are the mothers of human invention who crystallize in their own way the realities of history.

"Yes, I know who he is, my dear Madame Le Hardouey," said the voluble Nônon, walking with Jeanne along the deserted nave and offering her holy water from the stoop. "I asked Barbe Causseron, the curé's servant. Barbe said it was a monk of the abbey, who had been a Chouan in his time, and that those rascals of Blues had made those horrible wounds all over his face. Jesus, my dear Saviour!

it is no longer the face of a man, but a martyr! To-morrow at dusk it will be a week since he arrived at the curé's house, Barbe Causseron told me, and by the holy cross he did not look like what he was, for he wore the big boots and the spurs of a soldier and added to that a sort of helmet which does not look much like a priest's costume. When he came in with that marked and pitted face, the unhappy Barbe, who is none too courageous, felt her blood run cold. Fortunately the curé, who was reading his breviary along the peach trellises of the garden, came up and showed him the utmost politeness, as to a man of great family, which he is, who, but for the Revolution, would have been Abbé of Blanchelande and Bishop of Coutances. Indeed, he is a friend of Monseigneur Talaru, the old bishop who emigrated. Things have gone so far since he has been at the rectory that the curé does not eat in the kitchen but in the little room at the side, and Barbe, who waits on the table, hears all their conversation. It appears that the new government proposed to this abbé—wait, what is his name? Abbé de la Croix-Gingan, or Engan, a name something like that—that he should be bishop; but he did not want to be anything except under the king—(and here Nônon lowered her voice as if she were afraid to speak the proscribed name aloud). He spoke of renting the little house of goodman Bouet, which is just opposite the priory. Then, my dear Madame Le Hardouey, we would have one priest the more

in the parish; but may God forgive me if I offend! It seems to me that I could never go to confession to him, however meritorious and exemplary he may be. I don't know what would happen to me if I saw his face near mine through the grating of the confessional. But I think I should always be afraid, as I received absolution, of thinking more of the devil than of the good God!"

"For a pious girl like you, Nônon," said Jeanne Le Hardouey gravely, "that is a very wrong thought. You know that it is not to the man in a priest we confess, but to God."

"I know they say that in the catechism and in the pulpit," replied Nônon, "but the good God demands no more strength than one has and I feel it would be impossible for me to confess the same way to all the priests. Confidence cannot be commanded."

Chatting thus, they had arrived at the cemetery which surrounds the church and is closed on this side by a rail fence. It was not yet night, but day was slipping little by little from the sky.

"I shall have to hurry, my good Nônon," said Jeanne, "for I have a good bit of road from here home. I let all our servants go after vespers and I stayed late in church. The roads are bad and one cannot go quickly in these sabots. Good night then, Nônon; if you come to the farm this week you know well, my girl, that there is always a little lunch there for you."

"You are very kind, Madame Le Hardouey," said

Nônon Cocouan. And doubtless to repay one politeness with another, "Would you like me to go with you as far as the old rectory?" she added.

"No, thank you, my girl, no, thank you," replied Jeanne. "I am not afraid and I will go so fast that perhaps I will catch up with the servants."

And lightly, with the ease of a country woman, she jumped the bars with her sabots and skirts, caring little that she showed Nônon Cocouan the color of her garters and the most beautiful legs that ever passed boldly over a hedge and jumped a ditch with feet together.

Nônon did not insist. She felt respectful deference for Jeanne Le Hardouey, whom she had known years ago as Mademoiselle de Feuarent. She would gladly have rendered her service, but Nônon had all the superstitions of the countryside where she was born. The old rectory (or to use the idiom of the peasants, the old "*probytère*") was as much feared as the moor of Lessay itself. It was the ruin, abandoned long ago, of the ancient rectory situated at a solitary crossroads where six roads met and cut one another at an acute angle. Quite a number of buildings which were still standing belonged to a farmer who did not live there but who utilized them to store his barley and hay. It was said to be a place haunted by evil spirits and also that you often met big cats there, who walked obstinately beside you along the road, and would all of a sudden begin to say "good evening" to you with a strange air. The Cocouan was not at all

eager to go there as night approached, and then to come back alone by the roads which led to it. She turned around to look at Jeanne, who was going ahead, jumping the pools from one stone to another in the broken roads. When she saw the blue pelisse turn at the end of the hedge, she said to herself:

"She is not as timid as I am and she is younger. She has more education than all the rest of us. She is the daughter of Louisine-of-the-Hatchet, and she is a Feuardent on her father's side. I have heard my dead relatives say that they were people who had never seen anything under the vault of the heavens that could frighten them."

Reassured as to the fate of Jeanne, she retraced her steps, bowed and blessed herself before the grey stone cross which rose in the center of the cemetery, made another reverence and another sign of the cross as she passed between the yew with its sea-green foliage and the portal of the church opposite, where according to the ancient custom this tree of the dead was always planted, and she promptly regained the group of houses which they called the village, where she lived. When she passed through the ancient cemetery, surrounded by crumbling walls which man had forgotten to mend, or through the high grass which no scythe had ever cut, bending in the evening breeze like a harvest of death—when she heard the crows croaking in the grated openings of the belfry, at this fall of a winter day, grey and low, her soul open to every feeling of a religious nature, ignorant and timid—she con-

gratulated herself, drawing her white wool mantle close, that she was not at the old rectory at this hour, in the shoes of Jeanne Le Hardouey.

Jeanne, however, strode on with a heart as firm as her step. Accustomed to all the roads of the neighborhood, which she had gone over many a time since she had been married, both on horseback and afoot, and even before, she was too preoccupied to-day to fear any evil mishap even along this road of sinister reputation.

Chapter Five

TO UNDERSTAND this new preoccupation, so sudden and so demonic, of which she afterward became the victim, we must first understand what Jeanne-Madelaine Feuarent, the wife of Maître Thomas Le Hardouey, was.

She was a woman in the prime of her youth, active, courageous, of that upright mind, keen and superior, which one finds in a great number of Norman women, the classic soil of that strong race of housekeepers who understand so well the government of the home. She must have inspired much respect in the countryside, for although rich with the ill-acquired wealth of Thomas Le Hardouey, who was known as a man both violent and tricky, she was not hated.

They knew how to distinguish her from her husband when they spoke of her. They reproached her with nothing except perhaps a little haughtiness when they remembered her marriage, though they pardoned it when they remembered her birth. The Feuarents had been a powerful family.

Faults of character, misfortunes, passions, this triple cause of all the downfalls in the world, had for many centuries pushed the Feuarents, from generation to generation, to complete ruin. Before the outbreak in 1789 the ruin was complete.

Jeanne-Madelaine Feuardent, the last shoot of that uprooted Norman oak, an orphan at the mercy of fate, had been taken by the family of the Avelines, who were under great obligations to the Feuardents, and brought up as one of their own children. But for that she would have had to join the marquises of Pottigny, in their misery, "whom I have seen begging at the door, sir!" Maître Louis Tainebouy said to me with a sort of religious horror, a dying flicker of that divine flame of respect for race, dead now in all hearts but still burning in this last peasant of the old days.

The Avelines (Aveline de la Saussaye, as they liked to be called) were bourgeois of honorable antiquity, who under the old French monarchy, were the nobility to come, for the nobility always finished by opening its heart to them, investing them with certain responsibilities, a grave initiation into public life, which they did not define as we do to-day: government of all by all—which is both impossible and absurd—but the government of all by some, which is possible, moral, and intelligent. Jeanne-Madelaine de Feuardent shared an education as cultivated as it could be in the country at that time, and it was already too much for the life she had to lead. What was fitting for the daughter of the Feuardents might be a danger for a woman whose destiny was not on a level with her name. When she had attained the age of marriage the Revolution was over and the children of the Avelines, who had

been brought up with her, were married and scattered about the neighborhood, leaving her alone with their parents, who, feeling themselves on the edge of the grave, thought of establishing her in life. Maître Le Hardouey presented himself, and as he had not yet stained his reputation as an honest man by buying the property of emigrants, the Avelines favored his suit for their adopted daughter. But Jeanne-Madelaine did not like her suitor. The blood of the Feuardents revolted in her virgin heart at the idea of marrying a peasant and a man like Maître Thomas Le Hardouey, much older than she, with rough manners and a character which shocked her delicate, young girl's instincts. At first she would not agree. Indeed, it needed the cruel power of circumstance to bring her to a decision not to give her hand, but let it be taken by this man for whom she felt nothing but distaste. But foresight, that severe counselor—foresight, that sentiment so deeply rooted in the Normans, showed her the future in all its somber and disquieting realities. The Avelines might die any day and then what would become of her? The Revolution had destroyed all the convents, the natural refuge of noble women without fortune, whose pride would not suffer them to bear the shame of a misalliance.

What resource remained to her? Would she be obliged to go out as a day worker, or, worse still, take some menial position? Such a thought broke her spirit. She remembered her mother, who was

a plebeian, and thus the last ramparts of her pride were broken down and she turned away her head and let herself be married.

Her mother was Louisine-of-the-Hatchet, as she had been called by Nônon Cocouan, and hers was the first misalliance in the Feuardent family whose name she bore, a family who were to be extinct in her. Hers, Jeanne-Madelaine's, was to be the second and the last.

Her father, the lord of Feuardent, had crowned a life of excesses and of vice by a marriage which had cut him off, so they said, from all the nobility of the country round.

At an age when men's passions take on something more imperious and more disordered than they have in their shallow youth, he had married the daughter of a common gamekeeper of one of his friends, a neighboring landowner, the lord of Sang-d'Aiglon, Vicomte de Haut-Mesnil. This friend, this Sang-d'Aiglon de Haut-Mesnil, was a man much more vicious and discredited even than Feuardent was. He had left throughout the country memories which, if touched upon to-day by the generation which has heard him spoken of by their fathers, evoke either a fire of imprecation or an icy pallor of fright.

For twenty years he had been the horror and desolation of the whole countryside. The last of a race made for great things which, decrepit though still physiologically potent, ended in him in an immense perversity; he was impious, debauched, a duelist, a contemner of all divine and human laws.

He had all the vices which could be held in a band of iron without breaking, for his soul was one of those that the most frightful corruption could not soften.

It was said that this daughter of the gamekeeper, old Dagoury, was really Haut-Mesnil's. Dagoury was the famous trumpeter who called them to the chase and put all the instruments out of tune with his red-hot breath so that they said that he had a pact with the devil to be able to sound with such strength! Yes, it was said that Dagoury's daughter was not his own and the dissolute habits of his master explained the shame of his servant. This girl was the beautiful Louisine. Another thing that added to the likelihood of the rumors was that Louisine was never treated like the daughter of a servant in the castle of Haut-Mesnil. She had a strange position there, exceptional and daring, above all since the day when she had gained, by an astonishing intrepidity in so young a child, the singular name of Louisine-of-the-Hatchet, which she bore till her death. This in a few words, is what happened:

One Sunday all the village people were at high mass, and for the past week Ruffin Dagoury had been hunting the wild boar with his master through the neighboring forest.

Louisine was alone in the castle. It was the more imprudent to let a girl of fifteen keep it, since at this epoch the entire country was infested by a troop of formidable brigands. But it is also a

characteristic trait of Normandy that the bold sense of security in this country which believes in deeds, as they say in their own antique and popular tongue, never thinks of defending itself until the danger is literally at hand.

Indeed, in my childhood I have known isolated farmers with no neighbors nearer than a league or two away to go to bed tranquilly with the door open. You might have thought yourself back in the time of Rollo. Louisine, fifteen years old, was only one bait the more, a scent of fresh flesh for these miserable vagabonds who ran pillaging and setting fire all through the country.

But more a Norman than any one else, she never thought of them that day. She was coming and going in the kitchen. And as she was cutting one of those enormous slices of brown bread that are called *mousquetaires*, holding the loaf against her round calm breast, a beggar pushed open the door and asked for alms.

"Come in, my good man," she said to him, "and sit down on the bench. I am cutting bread for the soup; it will soon be soaked and I will give you a bowlful."

The beggar sat down muttering, and Louisine continued about the affairs of the house.

But in an interval of her work she passed into the neighboring room, and in a mirror before which she was adjusting her Sunday ruche she saw the beggar reattaching a false grey beard; and it was then the idea of theft and assassination talked about

all over the country occurred to her. "They have not yet gotten to mass," she thought, "and doubtless this beggar is not alone." As she thought of this she turned pale. She went to the fire and bent over it that the heat might bring the blood back to her face; then she lifted the pot with her arms stretched out and carried it smoking into the room where she had been before and closed the door. After she had poured the soup into an earthen dish into which she had cut slices of bread she looked once more furtively through the keyhole as she had done before through the mirror, and saw the beggar opening a large knife under the table where he was seated. Then with that calmness of mind which is not troubled by the most impetuous palpitations of our hearts she took a hatchet under her bare arm and, lifting the earthen vessel in which the soup boiled in both hands, she cried through the door: "Good man, here is your soup; but I have both hands full. Open the door for me!"

The brigand with his knife in his hand came to open it, ready to throw himself upon her; but, cruel in her courage, she threw the boiling soup into his eyes, blinding him and making him shriek with pain. Then seizing the hatchet from under her arm she struck him on his forehead, as skilfully as a butcher strikes cattle between the horns and kills them, the head broken with a single blow. She left the hatchet in the wound and jumped over the bandit's body, which had fallen in a sea of blood, as she might have jumped over a tuft of eglantine at the foot

of a bush. Her action breathed of all the qualities of her country.

As farsighted as she was inspired, she closed and bolted the door, pushed the big kitchen table against it, and, unhooking her father's gun from the mantel above the fireplace, she went upstairs, taking no further thought of the body wallowing in its blood and rattling out its last agony. Once upstairs, she loaded her gun, opened her window, and waited.

Two brigands appeared. They went first to the door, which to their astonishment they found shut; then raising their eyes they perceived her.

"Open the door, little girl!" they cried. But the little girl aimed at them and threatened to fire if they did not go away. They laughed at this young thing, and as they tried to open the door one of them fell, hit in the heart. The other tried to avenge his accomplice by sending a ball at the young girl, who was reloading her father's gun. The ball carried away Louisine's linen headdress and left her bareheaded, and the servants of the castle, coming home from mass, found her at the window, her gun loaded, her cheeks as red as the red band which held her abundant hair, blonde as a sheaf of ripe wheat.

The brigand had escaped, and if there were any more in the neighborhood they had not dared to come near, as the end of mass was approaching. Ever since this memorable adventure Louisine had been treated like a spoiled child in the castle, or like a favorite sultana. That masculine intrepidity

in a little girl to whom perhaps only an opportunity was lacking to become a real heroine, this obscure Jeanne Hachette, who did not have the eyes of a whole town upon her to send electric shocks of courage to her heart, became an object of enthusiasm to the friends of the Viscount Haut-Mesnil, those nobles who, with all their vices, had remained faithful to one virtue—the virtue of good blood, which is bravery. Remi de Sang-d'Aiglon believed, doubtless, that he recognized an inspiration of his race in the courage of this child and felt his long mute paternity reawakened in quivering pride.

He made Louisine sit at his table and gave her, despite her youth, supervision and the charge of the castle. Often he took her out on hunting parties. He loved to see her bring down a boar as well as he, and ride, with the hardy skill of a Cotentin, the youngest and wildest of his horses. Certainly if Louisine had had a weak mind it would have been a bad school, this castle of Haut-Mesnil, these feasts at which she presided upon the return from the hunt, and where the guests brought women without virtue and restrained themselves the less since she was not a “young lady,” a girl of their own class, and everything reminded them of it, even Louisine’s costume. She had kept the headgear, that proud cap of the conquest, abandoned by the Norman peasants but none the less worthy of the head of a king’s daughter. Fortunately Louisine, who had no mother, belonged to that family of strong souls who bring up themselves, whose lips God has carven

in such a way that they can find nourishment even at the bronze breasts of Necessity. She knew how to impose a certain respect which they had long forgotten upon these unrestrained men about her. She even inspired in some of them those passions of insatiate souls which are roused with a fury like that of old Tiberius at Capri against their own satiety.

One can understand it. The young girl in her with her blushing timidities veiled the Amazon.

It was a piquant mixture, this combination of courage and gentle weakness in the young and innocent murderer of two men—these few drops of blood proudly shed, found upon her arms fresher than peach blossoms. This drink would have a new taste in their glasses for these blasé gentlemen, these satraps worn by pleasure, and more than one of them would have liked to try it. But Louisine-of-the-Hatchet, as one knows, knew how to defend herself, and she defended herself so well that Loup de Feuarent, who had only the remnants of a fortune and to whom no wife of a lower Normandy clodhopper would have been willing to give a daughter, having conceived an irresistible passion for the girl, married her and put the blot on his escutcheon.

Such was the mother of Jeanne, the celebrated Louisine-of-the-Hatchet, whom Jeanne resembled, said those who had known her. Louisine died shortly after the birth of her daughter. The hoof of a wild horse broke that heart which beat in a

breast worthy of nourishing heroes, and battered that beautiful breast in which no evil passion had ever altered the pure milk. Louisine had transmitted her strength of soul, like a divine breath, to her daughter; but it was Jeanne-Madelaine's misfortune that there was mixed with it the blood of the Feuardents, a worn-out race, ardent once like its name, and this blood produced in her an inextinguishable flame the moment it was fanned by that old witch Destiny, who so often rouses the passions in our drowsy veins with a lighted brand! Alas! When Jeanne had married Thomas Le Hardouey she had felt this awakening in her blood which watered all the dreams of a young girl in her heart and made them more ardent and more imperious.

But over this storm she ruled with the courageous will that she inherited from her mother, and thought that, after all, her blood mixed with that of a woman of the people had no right to complain too much! Later, the active life, the laborious and healthy existence of a farmer, which she had married with her husband, the household, the domestic interests, the separation from the class to which she belonged through her father, so weighed and acted upon her that she seemed to be only what she should have been, that is to say a woman who had accepted her destiny and who wore on her finger a wedding ring as the first link in the chain formed of duties which among us Christians is called resignation.

She had been as beautiful as the day at eighteen

years old, though less beautiful than her mother; but this beauty, which passes away from country women so much sooner than it does from women of the world, because they do nothing to retain it, she had no longer.

I mean that luminous flesh of roses melted and become fruit upon the virginal cheeks, that pearl of freshness in Norman girls beside which the rarest mother-of-pearl of the oysters of their rocks seems to lack transparency and dewyness. At this period the cares of an active life, the troubles of a regulated life, had extinguished on Jeanne's face that shadow of Aurora's tears beneath a more human tint, more worthy of the earth from which we come and to which we return—the melancholy color of orange, pale and bruised. Mistress Le Hardouey's features were large and regular, retaining all the nobility that she had lost with her marriage. But they were a little tanned by the open air, and touched here and there by freckles keen and savorous which suit the face of a peasant very well. The centurian countess, Jacqueline de Montsurvent, whose name will occur more than once in these Chronicles of the West, who had known her, told me that it was above all in the eyes of Jeanne-Madelaine that one recognized the Feuardents. Elsewhere one might confound the wife of Thomas Le Hardouey with the peasants round about, with all those magnificent mothers of conscripts who had given the Empire its most splendid regiments; but the eyes, no! they could not be mistaken. Jeanne had the

falcon glance of her father's race, the big pupils of an opulent indigo blue, dark as the velvet petals of a pansy, which were as characteristic of the Feuardents as the blason on the escutcheon. Only women and artists take account of such details. Of course they had escaped Maître Louis Tainnebouy, like a great many other things, when he told me the story that I completed after he had given me the first note on the moor of Lessay where we met. He, the rustic grazier, judged women much as he judged the heifers of his flock, as the Roman soldiers must have judged the Sabines when they carried them away in their strong arms; he saw only the signs of strength and aptitudes for health. With her slender figure, yet well set up, her prominent breasts and hips, like all her compatriots, whose destination is to become mothers, if Jeanne was no longer a beauty for Maître Tainnebouy she was still a fine woman. And when he spoke to me of her, though she had been dead for years, his Norman drover's enthusiasm was aroused and attained superb heights, I must admit.

"Ah, sir," he said to me, knocking the pebbles of the road with his ash stick, "she was a proud, upstanding woman! You should have seen her coming home from the market at Créance, on her bay horse, a stallion, fiery as powder; and she came alone, my faith! like a man, her black leather whip ornamented by loops of red silk in her hand, with her habit of blue cloth and her riding skirt open

on the side, fastened by a line of silver buttons! She sped along the road and made the four hoofs burn, sir! And there was not in the whole of Cotentin so fine-appearing a woman or one who could be compared with her!"

Chapter Six

JEANNE LE HARDOUEY, after leaving Nônon Cocouan, turned toward the Close by the road she had so often followed. Need I say now that she was one of those women whose impressions follow one another with the regularity that their temperaments stamp on strong beings? And nevertheless the priest whom she had just seen, that tragic *balafre* in a cowl, and all that gossip Nônon Cocouan had told her about him, impressed her powerfully and prevented her from walking as quickly as she would have done at any other time. The roads were deserted. The people coming out from vespers had turned in various directions and, although she had told Nônon that she would go quickly once she was alone, she did not hurry, for she felt no fear. Moreover, it was not cold. The weather, though breezy, was balmy. It was one of those soft days at the beginning of winter when the wind blows from the south and the clouds, iron grey and almost low enough to touch with a hand, seem to weigh upon our heads. Jeanne saw nothing that justified Nônon's apprehension.

It was still day when she passed the old rectory. Everything there was solitary and silent, only under one of the great openings of the court, round like the arch of a bridge and formerly closed by colossal

doors, now torn from their enormous hinges and rusting against the walls, she saw one of those vagrant shepherds, the terror of the countryside, browsing a few thin goats on the sparse grass which grew in the empty courts of this sort of manor.

She recognized him. It was the shepherd who a little time ago had come to Maître Thomas Le Hardouey for work, whom Maître Thomas had rudely repulsed, not wishing, he said, to employ people without recommendations. Le Hardouey shared all the prejudices of Maître Tainnebouy as to these folk who are, as a matter of fact, universally suspected by every one. But as he was rich and powerful he did not hide his antipathies and seemed to provoke the shepherds to an open struggle in order to overwhelm them.

He had more than once been heard to say, either at Lendormi's mill or at the forge of Dussaucey, the blacksmith, that at the very first death of one of his animals or the least mishap which he could impute to these shepherds he would clean up the country for good and all. Certainly such words, which most people thought imprudent, were not unknown to the men against whom they had been said, and that might have given Jeanne the idea, isolated as she was on these remote roads, that the man whom her husband had turned away and whom she now met by chance would be quite capable of playing her some ugly trick. But if the idea came into her head she showed nothing, and she was the first, ac-

according to the custom of the country folk, to speak to the shepherd.

He was seated on one of those big stones such as one finds beside all Norman doors. He was wrapped in his cape, with great red and white stripes like a woman's skirt, fastened round the neck. He was so still that even his eyes did not seem to move, and one might have taken him for a Druidic mummy dug up from some Gaelic cave.

Jeanne had to pass in front of him as she went and he must have seen her twenty paces away; but his green eyes, like the eyes of certain fish, seemed to be made to penetrate denser media than the element about us, and they gave no sign by their expression that he perceived anything.

"Tell me, shepherd," she said to him, "is it long since the people who came from vespers passed and do you think that if I take that short cut over the broom field from here to the Close, I might catch them up?"

But he neither answered nor moved; his eyes remained fixed in the same direction as before she came, and she was obliged to repeat her question louder.

"Are you deaf, shepherd?" she said, impatient as a woman who is accustomed to be obeyed and whose least word to an inferior is a command.

"Deaf for you, truly!" said the shepherd, still unmoved. "Deaf as the chickweed here, deaf as a stone, deaf as your husband was to me, Mistress Le Hardouey! Why do you ask me anything?"

Did you not refuse me, the other day? I have nothing to say to you any more than you had anything to give me. Stop," he said, taking a long straw from his sabot and breaking it. "The straw is broken! Do you think that the two ends which I have broken and thrown there can be mended and tied together by the winds?"

Anger trembled in his guttural shepherd's voice as he performed without knowing it, so many centuries after, the old war rite of the ancient Normans.

"Come, come! No malice, shepherd!" Jeanne replied, noticing that she was alone with this angry man who held a hickory stick freshly cut from the hedges in his hand. "Tell me what I ask and if you pass by the Close when my husband is away I will give you white bread and a good piece of pork to put in your sack."

"Keep your bread and your pork for your dogs," he replied. "Bread and meat do not appease the anger of a man. No, no! A man so dependent upon his belly as to eat forgetfulness of injuries with the bread thrown to him must have a gizzard instead of a heart. I will get even later, Mistress Le Hardouey!"

"Be careful with your threats, shepherd!" she said, more menacing than he and carried away by her quick temper.

"Oh, I know very well," said the shepherd with a long look and a bitter expression, "that you are as high as time itself, Mistress Le Hardouey! But you are not under the beams of your own kitchen

here; you are in the old rectory, an evil cross-roads where not a living soul will pass from now till to-morrow morning. There is nothing to prevent me, if I wanted ——” he added slowly grinding his teeth with a ferocious grin which made his glassy eyes glitter as he showed his hickory stick. “But I won’t! No, I won’t!” he burst out. “Blows bring other blows. Drop that stone that you have taken up and be easy. I am not going to touch you. They would say I had assassinated you if I had even touched your hair with my hand and soon I would be lying in the jail at Coutances. There are better vengeancees and surer. It takes time for the horn to grow on the steer, but its thrusts are none the less mortal. Go! Go on!” he insisted in a threatening voice. “You will remember the vespers you have just left for many a day, Mistress Le Har-douey!”

He rose from the conical stone, began to whistle an odd air which brought up a dog with long white hair, straight and sharp like fish bones, of the particular kind called sheep dogs, the most intelligent and also the most melancholy of all dogs. Then he went to gather together the goats scattered about the court.

Jeanne, too proud to add a word to those she had already said, passed on and crossed the broom field, less disquieted by the shepherd’s declaration of war than struck by his last words. What indeed did he mean by these vespers that she was to remember? What connection could he possibly have

with a religious ceremony, a shepherd who had probably never been baptized, one of those vagrant pagans whom one never saw in churches but whom one had seen more than once pasturing sheep on the sacred grass of the cemeteries, to the scandal of the religious? These vespers, it is true, were already marked for her by a singular memory; the sight of the unknown priest had sent unfamiliar sensations into her calm and strong heart. The shepherd's words, coinciding with the meeting of this martyr of the Blues, as Nônon had told her—the Blues against whom Loup de Feuarent, if he had lived during the wars of the West, would have fought—these words, coming after the impression which she had received at vespers, reinforced it and set it fermenting. The mysterious organization of the human mind is such a weak thing that an incident,—the slightest of circumstances, a coincidence, a haphazard chance—will disturb it at first and finish by dominating it. Jeanne was very pensive as she entered the Close, and could not help connecting the idea of the somber priest and the shepherd's menaces in her inward emotions.

But her activities and her ordinary occupations drew her out of herself, as they say, and were salutary distractions. She took off her blue pelisse and her sabots with their black laces and began to go about the house, her brow as serene as if nothing unusual had crossed her mind.

She gave her accustomed orders for her servants' supper, spoke to them as usual, and apportioned to

each one his quota of work for the next day. The people at the Close were numerous, servants and day laborers, and they made a big tableful in the kitchen of Maître Le Hardouey. While Jeanne watched everything with that vigilant eye which is the attribute of domestic royalty as of all other royalty, she heard them talking at table about the priest with the black cowl who had alarmed all the parishioners of Blanchelande as he marched in the procession. That was the event of the day.

"I don't know his Christian name," said the head man, a good talker with curly hair, who was eating a big buckwheat cake buttered with goose greese, "but may God punish me if I do wrong in calling him the abbé with the torn ghoul's head!"

"I've seen many gun shots in my life," said the thrasher who had served under General Pichegru, "but I do not believe that those are the marks of shots fired by men. If the devil makes that sort in the arsenal of hell, they would mark the men they hit like that, when they do not lay them out for good and all. Moreover, he looks more like a soldier than a priest, that cowed fellow! I saw him Saturday at about four o'clock in the morning, galloping along the road which is under the Chesnaie Centsous, a road to perdition, where more than a pair of wagons tip over each winter; he was riding a filly which seemed to have fire under its belly. The devil! I affirm and certify that there weren't in the whole army of Holland, at the time I was

there, a dozen captains of dragoons as firmly seated in the saddle as he."

This exactly confirmed what Nônon Cocouan had told Jeanne about the arrival of the strange priest at the curé's at Blanchelande. But beyond this detail the servants at the Close knew no more than Nônon about the abbé, whose unexpected presence and colossal ugliness had impressed the whole population, a population with so few external interests, occupied with work and earnings, faithful to the spirit of its fathers whose ancient war cry was, *Gainage!* Consequently they were not easily moved and they had not, like the population of the south, a natural tendency toward emotion and dramatic interest.

Now, it was decreed that this evening Jeanne could not separate herself from the thought of this sinister being whom she had seen in the garments of a priest so little suited to him. She repulsed it as a fatal obsession, but everything about her threw it back upon her. Sometimes there are in life just such interlacings of circumstances which seem to give one the right to believe in fate. The servants, after the evening meal, went out or went to bed, and Jeanne-Madelaine laid out supper for herself and her husband.

Usually, Maître Thomas Le Hardouey, when he was not at fairs or markets in the neighboring cantons, did not come back to the farm till seven o'clock to sup tête-à-tête with his wife or a third friend, some farmer of the neighborhood invited in

to chat for the evening. The Close where they lived, was an ancient manor home somewhat out of repair toward the wings, separated from the rest of the farm, and placed at the end of the second court, and although this manor was divided into several rooms, so that there was a dining room and a company room where Jeanne had arranged with sad pride all the rich furniture that she had inherited from her father—that is to say, a few old portraits of the Feuardent family—nevertheless, she and her husband ate at a separate table in the kitchen, with no thought of derogating from their dignity as masters or compromising their authority by living under the eyes of their servants.

It is an idea of the present times, when domestic control is degraded like all other control, to believe that in retiring from the common life, a respect which no longer exists is safeguarded. But let no one deceive himself; when we shelter ourselves with so much care from contact with our inferiors, we merely protect our own delicacy and he who says delicacy implies weakness somewhere. Certainly if manners were as compelling as they once were, no man would think that isolating himself from his servants was a means of making himself respected or feared. Respect is much more personal than is thought. We are all of us more or less soldiers or commanders in this life. Well, have you ever seen soldiers on a campaign less submissive to their commanders because they lived nearer to them? Jeanne Le Hardouey and her husband had kept up the old

feudal custom of living among their servants, a custom kept up to-day, if at all, by only a few farmers of the old school in the country. Jeanne-Madelaine de Feuarent, raised in the country, the daughter of Louisine-of-the-Hatchet, had none of the false pride or pusillanimous repugnancies of city women. While old Gotten prepared supper she laid the table. She was unfolding one of her beautiful embroidered cloths, shining white and smelling of the thyme in which it had been laid, when Maître Le Hardouey entered, followed by the curé of Blanchelande, whom he had met, he said, at the end of the road which led to the farm.

"Jeanne," he said, "here is the curé, whom I met on my rounds after vespers, and I have brought him, as it is Sunday, to sup with us."

Jeanne received the curé as she was accustomed to. She saw him often and often gave him money or wheat for the poor of the parish; for, religious by education and royal at heart, Jeanne was an alms-giver, as all the beggars of the country said, taking off their grey woolen caps as they spoke of her.

This liberality, often practiced without Maître Le Hardouey knowing it, was one reason why the curé frequented the farm. He was not drawn there by the master of the house who had bought up church property and whose reputation for this reason was far from being good.

Time, which throws over everything, grain by grain, an impalpable dust, which without history

would end by covering up even the greatest events—time has already spread its leveling sands over many circumstances of an epoch so little distant, and we no longer have the exact key to the feelings of that time. A man who acquired church property inspired almost the same horror that a sacrilegious thief inspired, and perhaps only the immortal reason of the statesman would understand to-day how fine and sacred that feeling was which appears excessive to the cowardly and bewildered minds of this actual generation. After the civil war, the curé of Blanchelande had to remember his ministry of peace and mercy in order not to look upon Thomas Le Hardouey as an enemy. Nor was it entirely out of consideration for Jeanne that he accepted the attentions of the rich proprietor, his parishioner, who indeed offered them partly in deference to his wife and partly out of that spirit of coarse ostentation and loud hospitality of all parvenus. The curé, on the other hand, had all those qualities which make a priest acceptable to the irreligious, limited, and sensual men like Le Hardouey, and there were many such clergy who sprang up in the eighteenth century. Curé Caillemer was what one would call an open-handed man, of jovial humor, his spirit as round as his stomach, having faith and good morals despite his love for bottled cider, coffee with sugar and brandy in it, and liqueurs, three little temptations which, alas! can sometimes wreck the masculine severity of a clergy born poor, whose youth never knew the early gaieties of life. Curé Caillemer

added to all these common qualities the fact that his exterior had not that quality of sacerdotal dignity which the lower classes cannot bear because it awes them and they are obliged to respect it.

"When I met the curé," said the farmer, sitting down at the table shining with pewter pots, and speaking to his wife, "he was not alone, but had a colleague with him. Had he not been a colleague, and were I not afraid of lacking respect toward the curé, I would say that he looked more like the devil than like a priest. I invited him in to supper, too, although, by my faith, Jeannine, you might have been afraid of him, brave though you are."

Jeanne smiled, but her cheeks burned.

"I know," she said, "I saw him at vespers and at Benediction."

"It is the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, dear madam," said the curé, knotting his napkin under his chin to save his beautiful Sunday cassock, "and you were wrong to take his refusal, Maître Le Hardouey, for pride, as I told you, for I know from a definite source that he was invited a week ago to Madame the Countess of Montsurvent's."

"Huh!" said Le Hardouey in a distrustful and incredulous tone. "You need not say that that man is not proud. I wasn't hatched out yesterday morning and I understand something of men. But, God in heaven! where did he get those terrible wounds which have plowed up his face as the plowshare tears up a field?"

"Oh, Holy Mother of God!" said the curé, swal-

lowing *ore profundo* a large spoonful of cabbage soup, "it's a tragic enough story."

And, gossip that he was, he began the story of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan.

"He was," he told his hosts, "the fourth son of the Marquis de la Croix-Jugan, one of the oldest names of Cotentin along with Toustain, Hautemer, and Hauteville. According to the custom of the nobility of France, the oldest Croix-Jugan inherited his father's large property and later emigrated. The next entered the household of the king and at the beginning of the Revolution he was lieutenant of the bodyguard, and on the tenth of August he was massacred while defending the door of Marie Antoinette. The third, upon whose cradle they had laid the ribbon of the Order of Malta, went, when he was about fifteen years old, to join an uncle who was a commander and set out upon what they call 'the caravaning.' Finally, the last one of all, of whom we are speaking, was obliged to become a priest to obey the law of noble families of that day and was destined, while he was still young, to become Bishop of Coutances and abbot of the Abbey of Blanchelande; but he was a mere monk when the Revolution broke out."

"A fine abbey, Blanchelande," said Maître Le Hardouey, "and worth a lot to its abbot. It was a house of blessing to those who dwelt in it. Like Saint Médard, they never laughed heartily and they sang nothing but plain-song. They spent the time gaily there while Talaru was conducting the

diocese as a drunken man guides his mare, and, faith! this is no lie, for I myself have seen that bishop of the old school and all the monks of the abbey ——”

“Come, come, Maître Thomas,” said the curé, mildly interrupting these memories of his parishioner, “I do not want to know what you think you saw; you are a little inclined to have an evil tongue and perhaps you have evil sight and an evil memory into the bargain. I know that there were plenty of abuses and plenty of sins even in the Church, and that our Lord of Talaru, who had been a cavalry officer, never quite forgot his first estate. But there is mercy for every sin and the more so since he died as a saint amid all the miseries of emigration. God gave him grace to expiate by his death the scandal he had caused during his lifetime.”

“I will not deny it—but, anyhow—it is enough!” said Le Hardouey, who saw Jeanne’s eyes turn darker blue as they looked at him. “All the same it was not by chanting matins and vespers that the face of your Abbé de la Croix-Jugan got so marked up.”

“I believe you!” replied the curé, folding his hands over his bands with compunction. “Oh, my dear friends, what weak creatures we are!” he went on with the dolorous unction which he used in his sermons; “but revolution, that daughter of Satan, turned everyone’s head and it must bear the weight of many iniquities. Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, who

at Blanchelande was called Brother Ranulphe, would never have left his monastery but for the persecution of the Church. Instead of emigrating like the rest of us who said mass in Jersey or in Guernsey, he forgot that the Church held blood in horror and went to fight with the lords and gentlemen in la Vendée and Maine and later along this part of lower Normandy."

"Oh! oh! he must have been a Chouan?" said Maître Thomas Le Hardouey with an expression of irony which showed how much he was dominated by the passions of the day, half appeased but still burning. For he was a cunning enough fellow not to take risks and he would turn his tongue seven times around his mouth before he would utter a compromising word.

"Yes, he was a Chouan," replied Curé Caillemer gravely, "which is not at all suitable for a man of his standing, a Levite and a priest. It is the truth. But, Holy Virgin! It is the truth too that God punished him and wrote in deep letters his terrible punishment on his face. Moreover, the circumstances were so beyond the limits of human prudence, and the cause for which the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan fought was so sacred, since it was that of our holy religion itself, that there would be nothing to say if he had been a Chouan only, but——"

"But——" said Le Hardouey, his eyes shining with malicious curiosity, while he held his glass up to his mouth but did not drink.

"But," replied the curé, lowering his voice as if he were about to make a painful confession.

Jeanne felt a sort of shiver which ran through the roots of her hair combed up under the lace of her coif, showing the seven points of her imperious forehead.

"There are worse," continued the curé, "worse things than shedding the blood of our Lord's and His Church's enemies, although it is not a priest's business to do it and the holy canons forbid it. And if I tell you this, my dear parishioners, it is not that I am forgetting the precepts of charity, but sometimes it is well as a matter of example to proclaim the truth. Moreover, if the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan has been a great sinner, he is now a great penitent. Led away doubtless by the passions of the soldier's life which he led, he let himself go astray an instant in the human tangle. After the battle of the Fosse he believed his party's cause was desperate and, forgetting that he was a Christian and a priest, he dared with his own consecrated hands to attempt the execrable crime of suicide, which ended the life of the infamous Judas."

"What! he marked up his own face like that?" said Le Hardouey.

"Yes, he did it," replied the curé, "but not he alone."

Then he told the story of what took place at Marie Hecquet's, how that brave woman had saved the would-be suicide and held him back from death. Jeanne listened to the story with passionate horror

visible only in her beautiful parted lips and the contraction of her eyebrows. She uttered no exclamations such as feeble souls use to soothe themselves; she was silent, and the revery which had seized her at vespers began again.

Chapter Seven

THE meal was long, like all Norman meals. Curé Caillemer still talked for a time of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan. He was coming to live at Blanchelande, he said, beside the ruins of his abbey, to expiate by an exemplary life the crime of his suicide and of his life as a partisan. He had chosen Blanchelande because evil should be expiated where it had caused the most scandal. But with these Christian reasons was mixed another perhaps less exalted, which the good curé did not know. The abbé, a very important leader and chief of the Chouans, must have found himself under the surveillance of an anxious administration at a time when the war was over and pacification was not yet secure against the possibility of a fresh attempt. At Blanchelande, at Lessay, little lost places, he was less exposed to the vigilance, necessarily meddling, essential to all menaced governments, though one can hardly reproach them for it.

Soon, however, they turned aside from the former monk whose name and adventures had made the conversation suddenly so serious. The curé and Maître Le Hardouey passed to other subjects of conversation and became gayer toward the end of the repast. An enormous log burned in the fireplace, in the shelter of which the table was placed,

and this log, dissolving little by little into glowing embers, surrounded the three people with a warm atmosphere and joined its influence to the warmth which comes from any repast which is shared, above all when it is watered by bottled cider bubbling, amber and sparkling, which the curé laughingly called "the good God's pleasant bludgeon."

"It's not bad, is it?" said Maître Thomas, with the double satisfaction of the man who has both made and possesses it. "It is caramel in color and in taste. I myself have tasted every apple of which it was made."

"Holy Virgin!" replied the curé, his hands folded over his bands, a favorite pose, with humid jubilation on his lips and in his glance, "it must have been a like cider that the famous prior of Regneville was drinking with M. de Matignon when the thunder fell on the priory and dropped the canopy of the bed on their heads, like a dais of which they were the supports, without their feeling it in the least or taking the trouble to disentangle themselves."

This was one of the anecdotes of the countryside. The prior of Regneville was one of those priests, a high liver, "a grange for tithes," as they say in Normandy, whose colossal physique justified the nickname. He was very famous in Cotentin, a country of big eaters and intrepid drinkers, and he had become at the end of his life so stout that he had been obliged to cut a circular piece out of his table to accommodate the rotund capacity of his paunch.

The pastor of Blanchelande had known him during the emigration in Jersey, where he astonished and overwhelmed the English by the prodigious capacity of his stomach, always ready for anything, and the good Curé Caillemer had kept so vivid a memory of it that he never finished a plentiful and gay meal without talking of the prior of Regneville.

It was even possible to measure the rector's degree of mental excitement by the number of anecdotes that he told about the prior.

But the gaiety of the two men never reached Jeanne. She was living apart from what they were saying; she remained thinking of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan. This soldier priest, this commander of the Chouans, this would-be suicide who had escaped a voluntary death and the fury of the Blues, impressed her now by the moral side of the physiognomy as in church he had impressed her by the external side. The emotion she felt was like her first sensation. There was still horror there, but this woman of action and of race who had never consoled herself for her misalliance, felt an admiration for this monk, unfrocked by civil war, who had remembered but one thing, and that even at the price of his soul's salvation,—that he was a gentleman; yes, her admiration overcame her horror and changed it into an enthusiastic and noble pity. While her husband and the curé were drinking, she sat there gravely without drinking, holding her right elbow in her left hand, and playing pensively with a cross surmounted by a big gold heart which she

wore on a black velvet ribbon around her throat. Placed opposite the open fire between the two men, the flames lighted up her ordinarily pale cheek and also the intensity of her thought. Her absent-minded eyes never turned from the barrel of the hunting gun which shone mildly above the chimney-piece where peasants ordinarily keep their arms.

The day after this supper, which prolonged itself into early night, Jeanne Le Hardouey rose early and busied herself with the details of the house with a greater than usual activity. Her commands were briefer, almost hard, and her movements more rapid. Among very active people feverishness of thought is often shown by intensification of the habitual life, a sort of mute ecstasy of voice, glance, and gesture which may become well-marked delirium the next day. The night passing over Jeanne's cheek had not extinguished the flame that the troubles of her soul had lighted right under her eyes. One might have noticed that, as the day advanced, the burning mark deepened. After the noonday meal, when Thomas Le Hardouey had gone out to the fields, Jeanne threw her blue pelisse over her shoulders and left the Close. She was not hiding anything from her husband. She did not, like many women, take advantage of the moment when his back was turned to do something that he might have questioned. Maître Le Hardouey had great respect for his wife. He never asked her to account for her actions. Ten years of good sense and good housekeeping had accorded Jeanne an independence that city women

do not know in like degree, where every step they take is danger and sometimes treachery.

She went out to visit one of her old acquaintances, Clotte, as they called her thereabouts. It was the common abbreviation of the name Clotilde. Known everywhere by this nickname at Blanchelande, Clotilde Mauduit was a paralyzed old maid who had not left her house for many years and whose youth, like that of many of her beautiful and passionate contemporaries, had caused great scandal. Proud of her beauty, she had remained a virtuous girl until she was twenty-seven years old. A natural coldness had protected her. At twenty-seven, a foolish pride hurt at waiting, the rage of a curiosity which was Eve's downfall, a regret more frightful than remorse for having lost her youth, made her succumb. Her violent passions, always mental, never went lower than her eyes. The whole countryside had wooed her without success, when she voluntarily fell under the last flattery of the heap piled in vain about her haughty feet for ten years. It was the time when Sang-d'Aiglon de Haut-Mesnil turned his castle into a meeting place for a nobility, ruining itself in the blood of women when it was not nourishing itself on the blood of its enemies. Clotilde Mauduit, after her fall, was one of the village queens of the criminal feasts celebrated there. Only it was not about her hips that this bacchante wore her tiger skin, but about her heart. Nature had made this girl of the people in the vast and shining mold of great coquettes, not of those

who snare imbecile imaginations with the bird lime of love's apish tricks, but of those who have the murderous calm of the Sphinx, who excite guilty passions with cold cruelty. At the castle of Haut-Mesnil the *roués* who brought her there with so many other beautiful girls of the neighborhood called her Salome. There she had known Louisine-of-the-Hatchet, very different from her and from all the other women who gathered under the vaults of this dreadful castle, under the red arch of this devouring oven of debauchery, whence beauty, modesty, virtue, youth, never emerged except in ashes.

Louisine, who had lived there pure where the others had all been lost, did not remain long after her marriage with Loup de Feuardent. This acquaintance with her mother, this friendship of youth, was the principal reason for Jeanne's interest in Clotte. Whatever spoke of her mother was sacred. Still another reason for the interest in the Mauduit, which she showed so courageously (for in the countryside around Clotilde was dishonored and the weight of her dishonor still weighed upon her), was that, proud of the memories of her former beauty, Clotte liked to show her defiance of public opinion by boldly remembering the company in which she had once mixed. She had an exalted respect for extinct old families like the Feuardents. A proud vassal of those who had led her astray, she kept a sort of feudal pride in her dishonor. Old, poor, paralyzed from her waist to her feet, she had always shown everyone in the countryside a silent haughti-

ness which had never been bowed by shame. The companions of her debauches were all dead about her; the castle of Haut-Mesnil had crumbled, and the Revolution had scattered its ruins; infirmities had come upon her; she was isolated in the midst of a generation which from infancy had grown up seeing her pointed at as an object of reprobation. And despite all this, Clotilde Mauduit, or rather Clotte, had remained just as she was in the time of her culpable prosperity. She lived in a poor little cabin a few steps from the village of Blanchelande; the only thing she had in the world was a tiny court where she raised vegetables and fruits to sell and there she lived in scornful and lofty solitude. A neighbor who had calculated that Clotilde would leave her the little house or the court when she died as payment for her attentions sent over her daughter, aged fourteen, every day to help her. She saw no one and no one saw her—except Jeanne, for whom she always had a friendly welcome because of the name of Feuardent which recalled her own youth. Jeanne, who kept in her soul an immortal wound to her pride, found a certain joy, an avenging of all that her marriage had made her suffer, in her relations with Clotte, who had execrated as much as she the inexorable necessity of this marriage, and in whose eyes she was never anything but the daughter of Loup de Feuardent. Who would not understand the force of the tie which existed between these two women? Obligated to live with men, in her husband's house, interested only in

farming, Jeanne-Madelaine had never known the customs of high society which, but for destiny, would have been her own sphere; ignorant of it but instinctively attached to it, she never felt vividly, never lived really, except when she was with Clotte. Her repressed patrician soul rose when she was with this old woman, who talked incessantly of the great lords she had known, whose language heightened by solitude, by pride, by temperament, often attained an extraordinary eloquence. Jeanne, who knew only her prayer book, found real poetry in Clotte's recitals. This ruined woman who had never repented, who had grown old in sin, to whom no one held out a hand, touched the imagination of Mistress Le Hardouey and consoled her pride. Why should she not visit her often? The people in the village were astonished. "What the devil," they said, "has the old witch of a Clotte done to Mistress Le Hardouey that she should go to visit her hut so often, and why does she not let this remnant of indecency, who has been a shame to all Blanchelande for twenty years, fight it out with the devil alone on her cot?"

On this day Jeanne went to see Clotte, impelled by a set of circumstances which, ever since the vespers of the day before, had been gathering about her soul and agitated her in a singular way without her being able to understand them. It was three o'clock when she arrived at Clotte's. The door of the hut was wide open, as is the custom in Normandy when the weather is mild. According

to her usual custom, Clotte was sitting in a sort of big armchair by the sole window which lightened her miserable, dark, and smoky lodging on the side of the little court. The diamond-shaped panes of this window, lead framed, were so yellowed by smoke that the brightest sunshine of the most beautiful days in the year could not penetrate them, though the hut faced directly toward the westering sun.

This day, which was a winter day, there was no sun and hardly did a few rays of light pierce the yellow panes, which seemed to have the opacity of horn, and fall upon the troubled face of Clotilde Mauduit. She was alone, as always when Mother Ingou's daughter was at school or on errands in Blanchelande. Her spinning wheel—which ordinarily made a monotonous, serene, and dreamy noise, crossing from the threshold into the silent landscape and warning the traveler on the road that work and activity inhabit the depth of these ruins which one might think abandoned—her spinning wheel was mute in front of her. She had pushed it away a little into the opening of the window and was knitting blue woolen stockings, dark blue, almost black, such as all the peasants in my youth wore. Although age and passion had accomplished their ravages, one could still see that she had been a woman "whose beauty," Tainnebouy told me when he spoke of her, "had burned like fireworks throughout the countryside." She was tall and straight with an opulent bust like all the rest of her figure, whose large lines were still visible though the forms

had disappeared. Her flat coif "of fluted butterflies," which fell almost to her shoulders, showed about her temples two thick locks of grey hair which looked like an iron crown about her proud and somber old age. It was a face, furrowed with wrinkles, lined like a Florentine bronze which Michael Angelo might have molded and had the expression which strong souls imprint upon their faces when they resist scorn through the years. Without the gossip of the people around one would never have recognized in this face, like an antique coin with its verdigris eyes, the splendid mistress of Remy de Sang-d'Aiglon, a creature sculptured from the gorgeous flesh of Norman girlhood. Had the lips of this woman been devoured by the vampires of the castle of Haut-Mesnil? They were no longer to be seen. Her mouth was only a curved and proud line. Clotte wore a bodice of rust-colored wool, a pleated skirt with large black stripes on a grey foundation, and a blue cotton apron. Beside her chair was a hard pine stick upon which she leaned both hands when, with the movements of a serpent half cut in two, which drags its bleeding trunk, she dragged herself over to the turf fire in her fireplace to look after the pot heating in the ashes or her apples or chestnuts cooking for little Ingou.

"I recognized your step, Mademoiselle de Feuardent," she said when Jeanne appeared at the threshold of her house where straw was scattered. "I recognized the sound of your sabots." Since

her marriage, Clotte had never called Jeanne Le Hardouey by her husband's name. For her Jeanne was always Mademoiselle de Feuardent, despite the law and despite the affectations of men, so said this strong peasant spirit. When she was not execrating this marriage she forgot it.

Jeanne wished Clotte a good evening and came and sat on a stool beside her.

"Ah," she said, "I am tired." And she made a movement of her shoulders as if her pelisse were leaden. "I came too quickly," she added, answering the glance of Clotte, who had dropped her knitting on her knees and stuck one of her needles in the side of her hair as she looked at her.

"Truly," said Clotte, "you came too quickly. Sabots weigh like death in such mud, and the road must be very bad from the crossroads of Raines. You are not usually red, but your cheeks are like fire."

"I have almost run," said Jeanne. "We do go fast when trouble follows behind! It is one of those days, my poor Clotte, when work, market, my house, the whole life of activity that I have made, cannot prevent my having my heart ground between two stones. I don't know why, but you know that it is always at such times that I come to see you."

"I know it," said Clotte gravely, "and I saw very well that it was not only the fatigue of the walk that accounted for your color, my daughter. So to-day," she went on after a silence like a woman

speaking a language understood by them both—"so to-day is one of your bad days?"

Jeanne made a gesture of silent acquiescence as she bent her head.

"Ah," said Clotte, aroused, "those days are not yet finished, my child. You are so young and so strong. The blood of the Feuardents, which burns in your cheeks, will revolt a long time before it calms down altogether.

"Perhaps," she added, wrinkling her forehead, "children, if you had any, would do you more good than anything else. But children who would not be Feuardents——!"

And then she stopped as if she repented having said too much.

"Look, Clotte," said Jeanne-Madelaine, laying her hand on one of the dried hands of the old woman, "I believe that I have had a fever since yesterday evening."

And then she told of her meeting with the shepherd under the porch of the old rectory and of his menace which she could not forget.

Clotte listened, watching her with a deep look.

"There are other eels under the rock," she said, shaking her head. "The daughter of Louisine-of-the-Hatchet is not afraid of the idle chatter of shepherds who frighten working-girls. I will not say that they haven't evil secrets to kill animals with and to avenge themselves on the masters who turn them away; but what could one of these poor creatures

do to Mademoiselle de Feuardent? You have other things than that on your mind, my child."

But Jeanne Le Hardouey was mute, and Clotte, who seemed to be searching Jeanne's thoughts in her old head, scratched the grey hair of her lined temples with the end of her knitting needle, as one looks for something lost in the cinders of a dead fire, and she continued to watch her with her searching green-blue eyes.

"You have known so many people, Clotte," said Jeanne Le Hardouey after some minutes of silence, succumbing at last to the secret thought, "did you know long ago an Abbé de la Croix-Jugan?"

"The Abbé de la Croix-Jugan! Jehoel de Croix-Jugan, whom they called Brother Ranulphe of Blanchelande!" cried Clotte, suddenly become Clotilde Mauduit again with a shiver of memory which galvanized her age. "Did I know him? Yes, my child. But why do you ask that? Who has told you anything of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan? I knew him all too well, this Jehoel. It was before the Revolution. He was a monk of the abbey. His family had put him there when he was still a child, and my youth was already beginning to pass when I first knew him. They said that, like many other priests of high family, he had no vocation, but the youngest child of the Croix-Jugans for centuries had been a monk. Did I know him? Oh, my daughter, as well as I know you! He often left the monastery and came to the lord of Haut-Mesnil's on the days which they called their sabbat, and he must have

seen terrible sights there for a man who was to bear the abbot's miter and cross. Jehoel de Croix-Jugan, as he was called by Remy Sang-d'Aiglon de Haut-Mesnil and his friends, for they never called him by his name in religion, Brother Ranulphe, when he was with them, although he wore his white cassock and his canon's mantle of Saint-Norbert over it, at the castle between evening office and matins. I have heard that in calling him by his name as a noble they were trying to deepen in his heart his disgust with his condition as priest, and I do not find it hard to believe that was the idea of those reprobates, my child."

"What was he like when you knew him?" said Jeanne-Madelaine eagerly.

"As I have told you, my daughter, he was very young then," said Clotte, "yes, young in years, but anyone who saw or heard him would not have thought so; he was as sober as an old man. His face never brightened up. They say he was not happy as a monk, but despite his great youth, he was not a man to complain or to wear the tonsure, which burned his head, less proudly than he would have worn a steel helmet. He was as high as the heavens and I think pride was his great vice. For as I have already told you, my child, we were a troop of madcaps there at the castle Haut-Mesnil, and yet never, never have I heard it said that the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan forgot his priest's robe with any of us."

"Why, then, if he was what you say," replied

Jeanne, "did he go to the castle of Haut-Mesnil?"

"Why? Who knows why, my daughter?" said Clotte. "He found there great lords like himself, men of his own kind, and occupations which suited him better than saying the offices at the abbey. He wasn't born to do what he did. He went hunting often, monk though he was, with the lords of Haut-Mesnil, la Haye and de Varanguebec, and he was always the one who killed the most wolves and boars. How many times I have seen him at supper cutting off the bleeding boar's head and the muddy paws of the beast killed that morning and plunging them into the basin of brandy which they set on fire while they smeared our lips with it. Oh, my daughter, I wouldn't tell you the blasphemies and abominations that he heard there. 'Here,' Richard de Varanguebec would say to him, pouring out the blazing brandy, that demon's draught, 'you like this better than the blood of Christ, chalice-drinker!' But he would go on drinking in silence, somber as the woods of Limore and cold as a rock in the sea in face of the excesses which he witnessed. No, Jehoel de la Croix-Jugan was not a man like other men. When the Revolution came he was one of the first to disappear from the cloister. They say that he went out into the Bocage and killed as many Blues as he had formerly killed wolves. But why are you asking me about the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, my daughter?" interrupted Clotte, dropping the memories that had surged over her and coming back to the question of Jeanne Le Hardouey.

"He has come back to Blanchelande and yesterday he was at vespers, Mother Clotte," replied Jeanne-Madelaine.

"He has come back!" said the old woman eagerly. "You are sure that he has come back, Jeanne de Feuardent? Ah, if you are not mistaken, I will drag myself on my stick to church to see him again; he was a part of my wicked and culpable youth, but the memory of it pursues me all the time; sometimes I think," she went on, closing her ardent and staring eyes, as if she were looking into herself—"yes, I believe that my old vices bewitch me, else why should I here on the edge of the grave wish to see again this Jehoel de la Croix-Jugan?"

"All the more as you would not know him again, Mother Clotte!" said Jeanne. "If you were to see him again, I would defy you to say whether it was he or not. They say that in a moment of despair, when he thought the Chouans were lost, he fired a gun straight into his face. God did not permit him to die of it, but it left on his face the imprint of his unaccomplished crime as a warning to others and perhaps to make him a horror to himself. Everyone trembled yesterday in the church of Blanchelande when he appeared."

"What!" said Clotte, astonished. "Jehoel de la Croix-Jugan no longer has the beautiful face of a Saint Michael killing the dragon! He lost it by the gun of a suicide, just as we who thought him so beautiful, we ruined girls of Haut-Mesnil, lost our beauty through grief, loneliness, the misfortunes

of the time, and old age! He is still young, and yet a gun-shot and despair have put him upon an equal footing with us. Ah, Jehoel, Jehoel!" she added with that absent-mindedness which makes old people talk when they are alone to the invisible specters of their youth, "you laid hands upon yourself and destroyed that sinister and ominous beauty which promised what you have become. What would Dlaide Malgy say if she were living and saw you again?"

"Who was Dlaide Malgy, Mother Clotte?" said Jeanne Le Hardouey, much disturbed, while her interest grew as the old woman talked.

"She was one of us and the best of all, perhaps," said Clotte; "she was a friend of your mother's, Jeanne de Feuardent. But, alas! Louisine, who was good, could not save Dlaide Malgy with her counsels. The poor child was ruined like all the rest who frequented the castle of Haut-Mesnil, like Marie Otto, Julie Travers, Odette Franchomme, and Clotilde Mauduit with them; all proud girls preferring to be the mistresses of lords to marrying peasants as their mothers did. You do not know, Jeanne de Feuardent, you never will know—you who were forced to marry one of your father's vassals—what the love of such men was, in the old days; they were the masters of others and boasted that the color of the blood in their veins was not the same as our blood. It was impossible to resist them. Dlaide Malgy learned it by experience. She was one of the maddest of the mad who

gave up her virtue to Sang-d'Aiglon de Haut-Mesnil and his abominable companions. But she was punished for it. Oh, we were all punished! but she was the first who felt the hand of God stretched like a flame above her. In the midst of all the perdition in which our youth was consumed she loved Jehoel de la Croix-Jugan, the beautiful white monk of Blanchelande, as she had never loved anyone, as she did not believe, she who was so light-hearted and gay, that anyone could love a man, a being made of earth and doomed to die, and she hid nothing. Beautiful, amorous, and become shameless, she thought it easy to make herself loved. But she was wrong. She was only despised for her pains. We were not of the sort to arouse passions in Jehoel, if he had any. Roger de la Haye, Richard de Varanguebec, Jacques de Néhou, Lucas de Lablaierie, Guillaume de Hautemer all laughed at the despised love of Dlaide. 'Now show your beauty and your pride,' they said. 'A monk's robe is inflammable but you cannot set fire to it. You have found your master and your master will none of you.' She, exasperated by their mockery, swore that he should love her. But the oath was a perjury. Jehoel was thinking of things they knew nothing about; the steel of his hunting gun was less hard than his proud heart and he never wiped off the blood of the massacred beasts that he brought back from the depth of the forest on our aprons. We were nothing to him. One night at one of those feasts that lasted all night, Dlaide before us all

avowed her mad love for him. But instead of listening to her, he took down a copper horn from the wall and, holding it to his pale lips, he drowned the voice of the unhappy girl in the pitiless sounds of the horn and played for a long time an outrageous and terrible melody, as if he were one of the archangels who one day will sound the Last Judgment. If I lived to be a hundred, Jeanne-Madelaine, I would never forget that formidable movement, that cruel action of the priest, and the way he looked as he did it. As for poor Dlaide, she went quite mad. Her poor head lost, she gave herself up to witches who gave her powders to make herself beloved. These she threw secretly from behind into the monk's glass at supper; but the powders were lies; nothing could poison the soul of Jehoel. Unworthy though he was, was God guarding his priest? Or did the spirit of evil use the anointed of the Lord the better to master the heart of Dlaide? It was a frightful example for all of us, but we did not profit by it. Dlaide Malgy was soon taken for one possessed who ran with low company throughout the country. Women made the sign of the cross when they met her along the roads, or seated in the thickets, almost in the state of an idiot with her broken heart. Some said she was not always so quiet and that they saw her at night rolling and screaming on the stones along the roads of Broquebœuf, shrieking with pain in the moonlight like a hungry she-wolf. It might have been a mere invention what they said about the road of

Broquebœuf—but what is certain is that when we went bathing in the river I counted a great many wounds, black and blue places on her poor body: and when I asked her, ‘What is that? How did you get it?’ she said wildly: ‘It’s gangrene which came from my heart and is eating me all over.’ Oh, her beauty and her health were soon gone. A cough got her. She was the weakest among us. But the illness and her body, melting like tallow in the fire, did not prevent her leading the life that we led at Haut-Mesnil. Not many were delicate among the profligates who lived there! The love of Malgy for Jehoel, her malady, her thinness, her languor, which she inflamed by drinking gin as one drinks water when one is thirsty, so that her hands trembled, her lips turned blue, and she lost her voice, nothing stopped the wretches who surrounded her. They liked, they said, to mount the belfry while it was burning, and they passed her from hand to hand, this dying girl, and each one took his fill of the consumed creature who was still aflame but not for them. And so, poor unfortunate, they killed her! It did not take long. But why are you turning pale, Jeanne de Feuardent?” Clotilde Mauduit cried out, interrupting herself, frightened by Jeanne’s face. “Oh, my daughter, has Jehoel still the gift of moving women, now that he is no longer the beautiful Jehoel of other days? Has he still that diabolical power which we used to think given by hell to this cold priest, since, despite the change of his face, you turn pale, my child, when

you merely hear him talked of?" This woman of passions had seen the subterranean lightning which passion sometimes throws up from the depths of a soul.

"Did I turn pale?" said Jeanne, frightened in turn.

"Yes, my daughter," said Clotte, pensive in face of this pallor as a penetrating doctor before the first symptom of hidden disease; "and may God punish me if I do not think you are getting paler."

Jeanne-Madelaine lowered her eyes and did not answer, for she felt that Clotte was speaking the truth and that something terrifying and indescribable was pressing on her heart and twisting it even more strongly than yesterday at vespers at the same hour. Nailed to the stool on which she was sitting, she, Jeanne, the strong, could not even raise her mortally heavy eyelids to Clotte, who was no longer speaking.

Maître Tainnebouy, who was no moralist and who had more regard for the hide of his cattle than for the human soul, painted with a rude and terrible word in his peasant's idiom what I am trying to express by nuances.

"Women can lose their souls over stories! That old witch of a Clotte poured out the venom of her gossip upon Mistress Le Hardouey, and from that moment she went mad like Malgy." Then he added: "Her blood sickened."

Chapter Eight

IT MUST have been a solemn moment, when silence suddenly fell upon the two women after Clotte's tale. Clotte, puckering her brows with troubled attention at the mortal pallor which enveloped Jeanne and seemed to penetrate to the depths of her flesh, watched this face turning into a block of marble and the heavy eyelids rigidly covering with their opaque veils the closed eyes. Jeanne-Madelaine's absorption in herself was so complete that if she had not held herself straight like a figure in bas-relief on her seat without a back, you might have thought she had fainted away.

Clotte put one of her hands with its thin fingers like the claw of a bird of prey on the icy wall of this forehead, unmoistened, unquivering, inhuman, a real cataleptic's forehead.

"Ah, then you are here, oh, Jehoel de la Croix-Jugan!" she cried.

Did the excited woman know what she was saying? Was she speaking of an inner vision that was there under the dome of that locked brow, in that living head which had for the moment become a corpse, which she felt of curiously with her fingers as the grave-digger in "Hamlet" picked up and threw away the empty skull? Or was she talking only of the return of the monk of Blanchelande?

Whatever it might be, the evocation seemed to succeed and a tall shadow stood up in the bright frame of the open door and a sonorous voice replied from the threshold:

"Who is speaking of Croix-Jugan and is able to speak, as if she knew him, of one once called Jehoel?"

The shadow, becoming more solid, turned into a man who entered wrapped up in a mantle worn so as to hide the lower part of his face, like the half-opened visor of an ancient helmet.

"Which of you was speaking, women?" he asked seeing them both there together. But his glance, wandering from one to the other, stopped soon at Clotte.

"Clotilde Mauduit!" he said, "is it really you? I was looking for you and I have found you! I recognize you, and the misfortunes of the time have not destroyed your memory, for you were speaking of the former monk of Blanchelande, Jehoel de la Croix-Jugan."

"I was just hearing, when you entered, that you had come back to Blanchelande, Brother Ranulphe," said the old woman with the tremulous respect due to her religious memories and also to the supernatural ascendancy of this man.

"There is no longer any Brother Ranulphe, Clotilde!" said the priest in a sharp voice, scattering his words like the last handful of earth upon a coffin. "Brother Ranulphe died with his order. The powerful canons of Saint-Norbert are gone. Coming

here an hour ago, I saw the mutilated statue of our holy founder serving as a buttress at the door of a tavern and the ruins of the abbey that I was to govern have turned to dust. Before you is an obscure priest, lonely, disarmed, vanquished, who has shed the blood of other men and his own like water and who has saved nothing, at the price of his blood and perhaps his soul, of all that he wished to save. Foolish vanities of the human will! nothing is left of the past, Clotilde! here you are old, infirm, paralyzed, so they tell me. The castle of Sang-d'Aiglon de Haut-Mesnil has been razed to the soil by Hell's Brigade. Here, see, this is black!" he went on, striking his sleeve with his hand. "The white habit of the Premonstratensians no longer shines in our impoverished and enslaved churches and this—look again!" he said with a gesture of tragic majesty, unfastening the black velvet mask which hid half of his face. "See what color and what form are left here."

The kind of cowl which he wore fell, and his gorgon's head appeared with its broad temples pierced and pitted by inexpressible pain, and a face where the radiating balls of the blunderbuss had marked it with scars like a rising sun. His eyes, two braziers of kindled thoughts, asphyxiating in brilliancy, lit up the whole face as lightning lights up a peak it has shattered. Blood, like a ribbon of flame, ran over his burnt eyelids like the eyelids of a lion who has been through the fire. It was magnificent and it was frightful!

Clotte stared stupefied.

"Well!" he said, proud, perhaps, of the effect like a clap of thunder, which his sublime ugliness always produced, "do you recognize, Clotilde Mauduit, in this remnant of torture Ranulphe de Blanchelande and Jehoel de la Croix-Jugan?"

As to Jeanne, she was no longer pale. On her pallor red spots broke out everywhere, dotting her with burning blotches, as if life withdrawn for a moment to her heart rushed back to knock furiously against the bulkhead of her flesh. At every word, at every one of the abbé's gestures, these alarming patches appeared. They were on her forehead and her cheeks. Several were beginning to show on her throat and her chest, and this disorder of her skin made one believe that Maître Tainnebouy was right in his coarse physiology and that her blood had sickened.

"Yes," said Clotte, "I recognize you despite of all. You are the same Jehoel who overawed us all in our mad youth. Ah, you great lords, what can efface in you the mark of your race? And who would not recognize what you are by the mere bones in your body asleep in the tomb?"

This vassal, with her idolatry of her masters, this daughter of a social order that was past, spoke to the thought of Jeanne, the misallied, who, since the story of the Curé Caillemer, saw no longer in the scars of the former monk anything but an ornament made by war and despair on the martial brow of a noble. This human oak, devastated at the top

by shot, had kept all the strong beauty of its trunk. Jehoel had lost only the mute lines of a face once superb; but over these broken lines there was a superhuman expression, and everywhere, except on his face, in the entire remainder of his person, the imposing abbot was distinguished by the forms and attitudes of those ancient kings of the sea, that immense Norman race, who have kept all that they have conquered and even at the end of the ninth century evoked that great cry at which history trembled: *A furore Normanorum libera nos, Domine!*

"Yes, good blood cannot lie. Look in turn, Abbé," said Clotte, "at this woman who is unashamed to sit on Clotilde Mauduit's stool. Do you not recognize her by her father's features? She is the daughter of Loup de Feuardent."

"Loup de Feuardent! the husband of the beautiful Louisine-of-the-Hatchet, dead before the civil wars!" replied the abbé, looking attentively at Jeanne, whose face was now scarlet from throat to hair.

The thought of her marriage, of her voluntary fall into the arms of a peasant, drowned her face in a fire of shame; she had indeed suffered before from her misalliance, but never as to-day before this nobly-born priest who had known her father. Fortunately for her, night coming on and invading Clotte's smoky hut saved her from the abbé's look when Clotte spoke of her marriage with Le Hardouey and deplored it as a cruel necessity and an eternal grief. If the feeling for family was

stronger in Jehoel de la Croix-Jugan than the spirit of his priesthood, Jeanne knew nothing of it, at least on this day. The priest dropped a few austere words about the misfortunes of the nobility, but night prevented her seeing the disdain or condemnation of a man of race with a pure escutcheon, manifested in those features tattooed by lead, fire, and cinders, adding the cold horror of distrust to its other horrors. With her temperament she could not have supported such a sight.

Can I make you understand this character? If it is not understood the story will be unbelievable. We should be obliged to return to the conceptions of Maître Tainnebouy, and these conceptions no longer belong to our times. For an observer who loses himself in the mystery of human passion and its sources they were not more absurd than anything else but the skepticism of a century like ours would reject them.

Nevertheless, the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan sat down by Clotilde Mauduit with the simplicity of a high-born gentleman who feels himself so highly placed in life that he cannot lower himself. Moreover, Clotte, for him, was not merely a good old common woman. If he was an eagle, she was a falcon. She represented in his eyes the memories of youth, those early hours of life, dear to characters who do not forget how happy or insignificant or culpable they may have been. Moreover, they were living in an epoch in which social misfortune had mixed all ranks and political thought was the only real

medium. France, red with blood, was exhausted. Clotte, an aristocrat, as they called all those who respected the nobility then, except for her paralysis, would have been thrown into the Coutances jail and from there taken to the scaffold. The abbé, Jeanne Le Hardouey, and she spoke of the times which had passed and their impassioned souls vibrated all three in unison. Clotte perhaps had greater rancors than those of the terrible disfigured man in front of her whose face had been so atrociously torn by the Blues.

"They have done you great harm," she said to him, "but I who braved them and their guillotine and who never would wear their tricolored livery am proud that they did not spare me. They caught me one holiday, four of them, and sheared me in the market place at Blanchelande with the scissors of a stable boy who had just clipped his mares."

The old woman's voice broke as she recalled this outrage and gave her sharp eyes an expression of unspeakable cruelty.

"Yes," she went on, "it took four of them to do this coward's deed, and though I no longer had the use of my legs, they were obliged to tie me with a halter to the post where they tie the horses to shoe them. I had always loved and cared for my body, but illness and age had broken it. And what were a few handfuls of grey hair more or less to me? I saw them fall with a dry eye and without speaking a word; but I have never forgotten the keen sound and the chill of the scissors against my ears

and, still hearing and feeling it, I shall be prevented even at the moment of death from pardoning."

"Never mind, Clotilde Mauduit. They treated you as they treated kings and queens!" said this singular priest who had the secret of consoling ulcerated souls by pride, as if he were the minister of Lucifer rather than a humble priest of Jesus Christ.

"Oh, I no longer complain," she said proudly. "I have been avenged. All four of them died an evil death, not in their beds, violent deaths, and without confession. My hair grew back greyer than ever and covered the injury done to the face of her whom at Haut-Mesnil you called Salome. But the outraged heart was more shorn than my head. Nothing grew there to cover up the trace of the injury done, and I know that nothing will ever tear from my heart the outrage of the offense, not even the death of the offender."

"And you are right," said the priest somberly, though he ought, so it would seem, to pour the oil of a pardoning word upon this stubborn resentment; but he did not do it. This, in parenthesis, somewhat belies the idea of the great penitence, the edifying repentance of which the Curé Caillemer had spoken at supper the night before at Maître Thomas Le Hardouey's.

That evening they waited for Jeanne-Madelaine at the Close. She was regular in her habits and ordinarily always came in before her husband. But that evening was an exception and her husband came

home first. Mistress Le Hardouey was not seen present at her servants' meal and Maître Thomas was heard several times asking where his wife had gone. However, more astonished than alarmed, he sat down to the table after the prolonged wait of a quarter of an hour. At this moment she entered.

"You are very late, Jeanne," said Le Hardouey as she took off her sabots at the corner by the door.

"Yes," she said, "night surprised us at Clotte's and it is so dark that we missed the road twice returning."

"Whom were you with?" replied Le Hardouey naturally.

She hesitated, but, overcoming a repugnance which we all feel when it is a matter of saying aloud the name that we read eternally in our thoughts, whose syllables frighten us as if they could betray our secret, she added: "I and that Abbé de la Croix-Jugan of whom our rector was speaking yesterday; he came into Clotte's while I was there."

She had laid her pelisse on a chair and seated herself opposite her husband, who looked troubled. She had not yet lost the flood of color which the sight of Jehoel had spread over her face. "He left me at the end of the road," she added. "I asked him to come in, but he refused."

"As he did me yesterday," said Le Hardouey bitterly. "Doubtless he is going to the Countess of Montsurvent's again."

He ground out the words with the hateful irony of a plain man who believes himself scorned. They

found a sad echo in the heart of Jeanne, for she also thought of the priest's disdain and suffered the more because it seemed legitimate to her.

Hatred is like love, submissive to the same mysterious laws. The former Jacobin of the village, the man who had bought church property, Maître Le Hardouey felt at first sight that the despoiled monk, the vanquished chief of the Chouans, the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, whom circumstances had brought back to Blanchelande, would always be his enemy, his implacable enemy, and that political peace had lied as to the hearts of men.

He did not say anything, but cut off a slice of bread which he offered his wife with a brusqueness so rough and agitated that it would have frightened a more feeble or more nervous imagination than Jeanne de Feuardent's.

Maître Thomas Le Hardouey did not like his wife to go to Clotte's, about whom he shared the opinion of the countryside. It needed a character like Jeanne's, and the power of such a character over a man as coarse and sensual as Le Hardouey, to make him bear his wife's visits to this old woman, who was good for nothing, he thought, but to turn the head of a sensible woman, and he never spoke of her except with concentrated hatred.

"Oh, old Clotte, she's a Chouan," he said, "and it's only right that an old chief of the Chouans should go to see her as soon as he settles in the country. She has hidden more than one of them in her bed-covers, the old wench, and owls never

perch on a tree where others have not been." But as Jeanne assumed the severe air which always mastered him, he added with an affected laugh: "And you too, Jeannine, you are a twig of the old aristocracy; it is in your roots, and you are only too happy to be with people like this old hag of a Clotte and this newly arrived abbé."

"They knew my father," said Jeanne gravely. This word produced the effect that it always produced upon them—a silence. The name of her father was a sacred shield that Jeanne-Madelaine set up between herself and her husband, covering her entirely; for if, enemy of the nobility as he was, as are all men of common extraction who hate the nobility only out of vanity or jealousy, Thomas Le Hardouey was very flattered at bottom to have married a girl of high birth; and despite himself he shared the respect she had for her father's memory.

That day and the following days at the farm there was no further mention of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan or of Clotte. No one spoke of them at all. Jeanne-Madelaine shut up her thoughts "in the tower of her bulwarks," as Tainnebouy said, and continued to manage her household and her affairs as in the past. The months passed; the time of the fairs came on and she went to them. In short, she showed herself to be what she had always been and as they had always known her. She was so strong. Only her blood, which had sickened, so Maître Tainnebouy thought, spoke for her. It

had mounted from her heart to her head on the day when she met the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan at Clotte's and never went back again. Like a human torch which the eyes of this extraordinary priest had lighted, a violent color, the fiery rash of her aroused blood fixed itself upon the beautiful face of Jeanne-Madelaine. "It seemed to me, sir," said the grazier Tainnebouy to me, "as if they had plunged her head first into a caldron of beef blood." She was still beautiful, but she was alarming, she seemed to suffer so. And the Countess Jacqueline de Montsurvent added that there were moments when a darker purple, almost violet or black, flowed over the purple of her fiery face; and these flushings, frightful revelations of her volcanic heart, were more terrible than any pallor. Except that it seemed like an illness and ended by disquieting Maître Thomas Le Hardouey and sending him to consult the doctor at Coutances, for a long time no one knew anything of this change in the life of Jeanne-Madelaine; but her life had become a hidden hell and its light had become a cruel red color shining in her face.

Chapter Nine

IN 1611 a priest of Provence named Louis Gaufridi was accused of having bewitched a young girl. This girl was noble and her name was Madelaine de la Palud. The record of the trial still exists. The facts of possession detailed there are as numerous as they are extraordinary. Modern science, which takes note of such facts and explains or thinks it explains them, will never fathom the secret of the influence in such colossal proportions, of one human creature upon another. It is futile to use the word love. That is merely lighting one abyss by digging a second in the first. What is love? And how and why is love born in human hearts?

Madelaine de la Palud, who belonged to the enlightened society of her day, testified that Gaufridi had bewitched her by merely blowing upon her forehead. Gaufridi was young, beautiful; above all, he was eloquent. Shakespeare has said somewhere:

That man that hath a tongue, I say, is no man
If with his tongue he cannot win a woman.

And, moreover, whatever the motives of the Abbé Gaufridi were, whether those of a fanatic, or a madman, or a man who knew how to make the devil serve his passions, whether these passions were pure or impure, what matter? He willed to exercise an

energetic power upon Madelaine de la Palud, and everyone knows the invincible magic, like the stroke of a wand, of will power. But the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan was, as he said himself, a mere remnant of torture; he frightened and tormented the eyes. He did not wish, he never willed, to inspire either hatred or love in Jeanne. The Countess of Montsurvent swore to me by all the gods that, despite all the rumors which were circulated, of which Maître Louis Tainnebouy was an echo, she believed him perfectly innocent of Jeanne's misfortune. However, what the old countess believed she knew, because she had known the former monk, the people of Blanchelande did not know, and it is always what one understands least that one explains best. The human mind avenges its ignorance by its errors.

On the other hand, the life of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan lent itself marvelously to strange imaginings. He had, as Barbe Causseron, the servant of the priest, had said, "enfeoffed" the house of old Bouet, near the ruins of the abbey, and he lived there as solitary as the wildest owl who ever lived in the trunk of a hollow tree. By day he was never seen except at the church of Blanchelande, wrapped up as on the first day when he was seen there, in the cowl of his black cloak which he wore over his surplice, whose deep folds, like flutings, gave him the look of something sculptured and monumental. Still under the ban of the episcopal punishment for having disobeyed the holy

canons and the spirit of his state by fighting with a fanaticism that they accused of being sanguinary, he was not permitted to say mass or to hear confession. The church, which has a genius for penitence, had inflicted the most severe punishment in forbidding him the great militant functions of a priest. He was required simply to attend all the offices without his stole, and he was never absent. Except on liturgical days, when he attended the church of Blanchelande, he was hardly ever to be seen in the neighborhood except at night or by twilight. The old habit of the Chouan, some said; black melancholy, said others; something strange and suspicious, said almost everybody. Certain people, reasonably distrustful because of political circumstances, maintained that this abbé-soldier, still dangerous, was hiding plans of conspiracy and a recommencement of civil war in his solitude, and that this calculated isolation served to conceal his absences, travels, and interviews with men of his party. "He who has drunk, will drink," said the wise. And perhaps the wise were not deceived in this exception to immemorial usage. From one Sunday to another the windows and door of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan's little house were strictly closed. Nor was there any noise from the stable, where his stallion whinnied, shook his mane, and struck the floor with his iron hoofs so loudly when his master was there, that one could hear it along the road thirty paces away.

Gossips who passed by this mournful and mute

house used to say with cynical bluntness, "That mad monk makes more pilgrimages than prayers!" But the following Sunday would find the black cowl in its oaken stall with the rigid and scrupulous punctuality of the priest and the penitent.

The mysterious abbé had led this impenetrable life for more than a year when, one Good Friday evening after *Tenebræ*, two women coming out from church greeted each other by the iron gate of the cemetery and started along the road toward the village, chattering.

One of them was Nônon Cocouan, who sewed by the day; the other, Barbe Causseron, servant of good Curé Caillemer. Both of them had what is called the gift of the gab and eagerly lapped up all the news and all the gossip of the countryside and spread it abroad, so mixed with their own chattering inventions that the devil himself with all his chemistry would not know how to filter it. Barbe was older than Nônon. She had never had the beauty of the sewing woman. Also, a curé's servant ever since her youth, because she offered so few temptations to the least virtuous imaginations, she felt her personal importance, and this feeling was heightened with a pious person like Nônon more than with anyone else. "She is near to the priests," said Nônon with respectful envy, and these words explained their friendship. What would Nônon Cocouan not have given to be in Barbe Causseron's place, even had she had to take into the bargain the pinched nose, the waist like a broomstick, and the yellow

skin, dry and wrinkled like last years' blessed palm. Barbe Causseron, the insupportable blue stocking of the kitchen, had a very doctrinaire way of saying "my girl" to Nônon Cocouan which she probably would never have borne but for the high position which consecrated Barbe in her eyes—"near to the priests"—which was the dream caressed by her heart in the last days of her old age, for Nônon wished to die a curé's servant.

"Barbe," said Nônon, with that air of mystery which precedes gossip among the pious, "you who belong to the Church, my very dear girl, do you know if our venerable lord of Coutances has lifted the interdict from the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan?"

"In the first place, my girl, there is no interdict, but merely suspension," replied Causseron with an air of instruction and of knowledge which made her flat coif seem the funniest of doctor's caps. "But no, no! not that I know of, my girl. The suspension is still maintained. We have received nothing from the bishop. It is ten days since the postman has brought anything to the priest's house, and if his powers had been remitted to the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan they would pass through the hands of the curé of Blanchelande, I think. *There isn't the slightest difficulty about that.*"

Barbe bridled as she said these words, borrowed from the vicar of the parish, who muttered them in closing his demonstrations in the pulpit, when the difficulty he was denying began to appear.

"That's odd, then!" said Nônon, walking along with Barbe and speaking as if to herself.

"What is odd?" asked Barbe, curious, with a thread of red vinegar in her voice.

"This," said Nônon, coming near her, as if the hedges on the two sides of the road had ears, "a moment ago I saw Mistress Le Hardouey, who was not in her pew while they were chanting *Tenebræ*, glide into the sacristy and I am certain and sure that there was no one in the sacristy but the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan."

"You must be mistaken, my girl," said Barbe comprehensively, her eyes discreetly lowered.

"No, no," said Nônon. "I saw it as plainly as I see you, Barbe. I was alone in the nave and the few people who remained after *Tenebræ* were praying at the sepulcher. The two confessionals in the Lady chapel and at the lower end of the church were full. You know there is another worm-eaten one near the font which was used by the deceased curé of Neufmesnil when he came to hear the confession of his parishioners at Blanchelande. The sacristan uses it now to keep the burnt candle ends and the copper candlesticks in, the copper ones which were replaced by the silver ones. Well, on my eternal salvation, believe it or not, Mistress Le Hardouey came out from there well wrapped up in her pelisse, very softly in her stocking feet, and went out by the other aisle through the choir of the church, where the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan was making his meditation in his stall, and then he got

up and they both went into the sacristy together."

"If you are sure you saw it," replied Barbe, who did not wish to deny for a moment longer what she was burning to believe, "I must say like you, Nônon, that it is rather astonishing, for what business could Mistress La Hardouey have with the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, who does not hear confession and who does not speak to three people except the curé?"

"True!" said Nônon. "That's the pure truth that you are telling. But to the three persons to whom he speaks I could add two more for you to whom he talks more than you think."

Barbe stopped in the road, looking at Nônon as an old cat looks at a jar of cream.

"You are sure you know?" she said with unspeakable sanctimoniousness.

"Ah, my dear dame Barbe," cried Nônon, "I go out to sew by the day. I have not, like you, the happiness, and honor," she added in an ecstatic parenthesis, "to live in the priests' house the whole week of our good God's seven days; to prepare dinner for the reverend fathers and to mend the curé's things. I have to get up every morning and come back to Blanchelande; I have to trot all around the neighborhood for my work, and that is how I learn to know a great many things that you, with all your merits, my dear respectable girl, really could not know."

"Have you heard anything," said Barbe, with a bubbling curiosity that began to boil, "about Mistress Le Hardouey and the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan?"

"Oh, nothing at all!" replied Nônon, who at bottom loved Jeanne-Madelaine, but who yielded to the desire for gossip which lies at the bottom of all women's hearts. "Only the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan and Mistress Le Hardouey know each other better than appears, as I can tell you. The abbé is a former Chouan and a lord and would not put, you understand, the toe of his foot into the house of a man like Le Hardouey who bought church property; but he sees Jeanne-Madelaine, who is a Feuardent, a girl of high standing, at old Clotte's. And he goes there very often and meets her there, so I have been told by little Ingou, who is sent off to school or to play jackstones at the other end of the court as soon as they arrive."

"At old Clotte's!" said Barbe Causseron, ruthless as an old maid who all her life long has never felt the cruel happiness of loving another and who has never been taught mercy by pain and failure. "At that Magdalene's, ill of her own vices! a pretty place for the rendezvous of a priest and a married woman! It is not possible, my dear; it would be too frightful! I could not believe it unless I saw it myself and *there isn't the slightest difficulty about that.*"

"Good Heavens, Barbe," replied Nônon, who was kindly, having once been a beautiful, indulgent woman, "the wrong is not so great, after all. We must not have evil thoughts of the abbé, who would frighten a woman more than anything else with his eaten-away face. And never, oh, really never

has anything been said against Jeanne. Her reputation is as pure as gold. And yet there have been a good many young people in love with her here at Blanchelande and at Lessay. If they see each other at Clotte's there is some Chouan plot beneath it. Clotte was once suspected of being a Chouan and you remember that they sheared her, as they said then, in the market place. They think they can trust her with their Chouan secrets, but surely there is no other evil to be thought."

"All the same," said Causseron, still distrustful, though she could find no answer to Nônon's sensible reasoning, "I must warn the curé all the same. If it is as you say, the sacristy of the church of Blanchelande ought not to be a nest for hiding Chouans and, moreover, all this Chouan business has lasted too long now that the churches are open again and we have our priests. This priest always frightened me," she said. "And they say terrible things about him. He will get all Blanchelande into trouble with his plots against the government. If he were truly penitent, monsignor the bishop would have restored his power to hear confession and to say mass a long time ago. But he must be very much carried away to drag a woman like Mistress Le Hardouey into his sin. Dear Jesus! what can they have done, the two of them in the sacristy? Perhaps they are still there at this moment! Oh, certainly I shall speak to the curé this very evening while I am serving his collation. Don't try to turn me aside. Good-by, my girl. I hold it a matter of

conscience under pain of mortal sin to warn the curé of what is happening. *And there will not be the slightest difficulty about that.*"

And having let out this jerky flood of words, she began to trot along in the wind which was pushing her, a dry cold wind of Holy Week, which had not once stopped blowing the skirts and mantles of the two saunterers and had carried their words over the hedges. Indeed, from that day on at Lessay and at Blanchelande they began to connect the names of Jeanne Le Hardouey and the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan.

Nônon Cocouan was not mistaken. She had indeed seen Jeanne Le Hardouey enter the sacristy of the church at Blanchelande, and with her good sense, void of malice, she had guessed right, "that there was some Chouan plan hatching there." Indeed, he had just returned from it. The Abbé de la Croix-Jugan had used Jeanne Le Hardouey in his plans for more than six months. He often saw her at Clotte's. With that keen glance of men called to govern others—and according to the observations of the Countess de Montsurvent, he was of that race—he had seen, doubtless, the profit that he could draw from Jeanne-Madelaine. Married as she was to a farmer and a grazier, she could go to the market of Coutances and the fairs around the country, carrying letters, information, and the signals agreed upon to the chiefs of the royalist party hidden or scattered about the neighborhood. Who would suspect a woman in Jeanne's position

who was continuing to do neither more nor less than what she had done all her life? On the other hand, by her strength of soul, by the proud and ardent memory of her birth, by the humiliation of her marriage, by the new and extraordinary sentiments which he saw in her and which showed themselves from time to time through the red mask of congested blood which the revolt of too intense a heart had spread over her face, Jeanne offered the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan an instrument that nothing could spoil, and he had seized upon her as such. This Jehoel who had remained mute and indifferent at eighteen years old to the wild and unrestrained love of Dlaide Malgy, this pale, white monk, who at the orgies seemed like an unsusceptible archangel fallen from heaven, upright among those who tottered about him, must have been one of those men dangerous to meet in life for tender hearts that know how to love. He was one of those souls all mind and all will, made of that implacable ether whose purity kills, and who in their ardors of flame, white as the mystic fires, embrace only things invisible, a cause, an idea, power, or a country. Women with their affections and their destiny weigh not at all in the vast hands of these men, empty or full of the worlds which ought to fill them. Now just because he was all this, might not Jehoel, in the interest of the cause to which he had devoted himself, although a priest, although he had not wished to inspire a culpable passion in Jeanne, blow with his marble lips into this lighted forge of a heart,

melting for him, despite its strength, like iron which finally becomes fusible in the flames?

For we must admit it, we must say the word so long held back: Jeanne-Madelaine was in love with the Abbé Jehoel de la Croix-Jugan. And if in place of being history, this book had the misfortune to be a novel, I should be forced to sacrifice truth to probability a little and to show that this love might not seem impossible, how and by what attractions a normal woman, of sane mind, a pure and strong soul, could fall in love with this monstrously disfigured man of the Fosse. I find myself obliged to insist a great deal upon Jeanne's virile nature, a brave and simple woman of action, for whom the familiar and heroic words seem to have been invented, "Any man is good enough looking so long as his horse does not shy at him." Thank God all this psychology is useless. I am only a simple story-teller. Jeanne's love, which I need not justify, whether it came through horror, pity, admiration, or twenty other sentiments, impulsions, or obstacles, possessed the heart of this woman with the fury of a passion which like the sea devoured everything that barred its passage; and this love which Jeanne-Madelaine had resisted a long time began to be visible at last to the least keen eyes. Extraordinary even to those whom reflection has taught how alien is love to all other human faculties, what must it have seemed to the people who surrounded Jeanne, to all these Cotentin peasants among whom she lived? In her own eyes Jeanne-Madelaine must for

a long time have believed herself bewitched—as other people thought, and as they still thought in the time of Maître Tainnebouy. The menacing prediction of the shepherd had sunk little by little into her soul. First she had laughed at and insulted its influence, but the strength of this thing that she felt made her believe in it. Otherwise she never could have understood what happened to her. When she thought of the object of her love she asked herself, “Am I depraved?” And the question but made her love the deeper—more marked by the character of the beast who is spoken of in the Apocalypse as the seal of the soul’s damnation. The story of Malgy would not leave her thoughts; she believed herself destined to a like end; but she was of another stamp than that violent and weak girl, for she had imposed upon herself the duty of hiding her passion, which was sapping her strength, and to reveal to no one the cruel enigma of her life. It is the usual illusion of strong souls. They think they can hide the madness of their hearts and in fact they do dissimulate for a period of time which exhausts life; then all of a sudden the shameful madness is seen and everyone is talking about it and everyone exclaims and no one knows how the thing has happened.

For Jeanne the hour had struck. Dating from the first revelation made to the curé’s servant by Nônon Cocouan, vague rumors, a word here and there, whispers rather than words, but whispers which were soon to become a storm, began to cir-

culate about poor Jeanne. First they talked like Nônon of the Chouans, but as the country remained tranquil, as the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan made no external sign to prove that the chief of the Chouans, always suspected in him, despite his pose of penitent attitude, was living and acting, they lost little by little their first idea to explain the sort of relation which existed between him and Mistress Le Hardouey. The royalist cause was indeed desperate and the efforts of this soul like Witikind's, breathing under the shadowy cowl of the former monk, would never succeed in awakening about him the languid souls of these gentlemen, his companions-in-arms. The days following each other without bringing any event, and the interviews at Clotte's between the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan and Jeanne remaining as frequent as in the past, astonishment took on the sly air of suspicion. "My faith," said many wise heads, "Mistress Le Hardouey may indeed be a woman of high condition, a demoiselle de la Feuardent, and the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan may indeed have a face as torn and cut up as though all the smallpox of the earth had marred it, but the devil is very mischievous, and if I were Maître Thomas I would not care very much for this intimacy of my wife with a priest who, despite his airs to-day, never cared much about his frock since he laid it aside so quickly to go to the Chouan war.

Such reflections, made in passing, gained a consistency involuntarily augmented by the unhappy Jeanne. She was suffering cruel torture. She had

reached that crisis of love where proofs of devotion do not suffice to appease the emotion felt. Moreover, these proofs themselves were beginning to be impossible. For a long time she had multiplied most perilous journeys for the abbé, who thought of nothing but of raising the fallen cause; she had carried dispatches for which she would have been shot, woman that she was, if she had been caught. When at Blanchelande they thought her at Coutances on her husband's business, she was on the coast, which is only a little distance from Lessay, herself delivering the letters of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan to the intrepid men who, like Quintal or the famous Des Touches himself, were carrying the correspondence of the royalist party to England. This adventurous life, which had sustained her, was no longer possible. The abbé had lost his last hope, and he had wrapped around himself with the rage which had formerly armed his blunderbuss, this burning robe in which he henceforth was doomed to die. Jeanne felt, too, that the eyes of this man no longer regarded her in the same way since he had been obliged to abandon his designs. With her nobility of character, and religious as she was, she must have suffered terribly from the disordered impulses which dragged her toward this priest whose soul was inaccessible. In the depths of her heart she saw herself dishonored. Such suffering cannot be eternally shut up in a "fortified tower," as Maître Tainnebouy said, and despite Jeanne-Madelaine's efforts to hide them, she could not prevent their being seen.

Once seen, once the great question was asked in Blanchelande, "What can be the matter with poor Mistress Le Hardouey?" God knows there was nothing more to add. Her good name was stained. It was precisely at this time that Maître Louis knew Jeanne.

"Sir," he told me in accents that I can never forget, "I have already told you that for a long time before this epoch her understanding had failed her and she looked what she was. I have often seen people speaking to her and she did not answer, but looked at them with great dead eyes like those of a stricken heifer—she who had had eyes that would break all the panes in a cathedral. All her property, the largest in the country, was nothing to her. She liked to mount her mare and go to market, but at home there was no longer a woman, sir, no longer a housekeeper, no longer a Mistress Le Hardouey, but a broken cross bow, a mere corpse in a corner. When Le Hardouey, who, it is true, was not much of a man, but who loved her in his own way, after all, as the end shows too well, asked her what was the matter and why she was like that, she said she 'didn't know what was boiling in her head;' and by the ox of the holy manger! she was right to speak thus, for her face looked like a furnace, like a lime kiln alight at night. I have often stood and thought that she was lost. Maître Le Hardouey took her himself several times to the doctors at Coutances, but doctors could not do anything for an illness which was not human, sir. And as proof that the

Evil One had a hand in it, and that she knew what talon had wounded and held her, the Curé Caillemer counseled her to make a novena to the blessed Virgin of Deliverance and, religious as she was, she would not do it. That was the final degree of sorcery and misery, sir: she did not want to get well; she liked her fate. Some talked of the shepherd of the old rectory and others of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, and, believe me, sir, they were terrible and filthy remarks that they made about Mistress Le Hardouey at Blanchelande, in the village of Lessay and further, and I have never been quite clear as to what they said; but, as true as we are here on this moor, anyone who, as I did, saw them a number of times in church, him, the abbé, black as a cloud in his stall, and her, red as fire with shame in her pew, no longer reading in her prayer book, standing when she ought to sit, sitting when she ought to kneel, could not fail to think that the master of the miserable bewitched creature was none other than this priest, who looked like the devil in a priest's robe, and who had come to defy God in the choir of His church, under the arms of the crucifix."

Chapter Ten

IT WAS at this period of which Maître Louis Tainnebouy, the brave farmer of Monte-de-Rauville, had been telling me, that old Clotte, who had spun at the door a large part of the afternoon, stopped the movement of her wheel, tired out. She looked around and called little Ingou.

"Little one!" she called.

But the little one did not answer. Clotte's house, which is now destroyed, was raised a few feet above the level of the road which went from Blanchelande to the village of Lessay, and there was nothing in the neighborhood except the hut of Mother Ingou, two or three gun-shots away, on the opposite side of the road, whence the little girl came every morning to help Clotte in her poor housekeeping. This day the little girl, who had attended early to old Clotte's affairs, tempted by the beauty of the evening and the last rays of the sun which lured her to wander, had taken her unlaced sabots in her hands and started toward the end of the sloping road which led to her mother's, kicking up with her bare feet the clouds of dust dear to children in all countries. It was because of this childish joy that little Ingou had forgotten to say that she was going and had not thought of putting Clotte's wheel into the house. Clotte, infirm and needing both

hands to lean upon her stick and painfully drag herself inside of the house, was totally incapable of dragging in the wheel which she had been using on the threshold for part of the day. "What shall I do?" she said, and then saw Mistress Le Hardouey coming toward her.

Poor Jeanne came slowly. She no longer walked as she used to with a firm and rapid step. Even in her walk there was something heavy and stricken which cannot be described. Her great white coif, the lawn crest which suited her decided face so well, was no longer worn high over a smooth forehead, and if it had not had black velvet ribbons to tie it under the chin, it would perhaps have fallen off her head, so bent now was the coif with the fixed thought which she bore on her brow as a bull bears the mark of the ax which has struck it. Seeing her come from the distance, this woman whose beauty and above all whose strength she had once known, the dry eyes of the proud Clotilde Mauduit which had wept, so she said, all the tears in her body over the ruins of her youth, felt the moisture of a last tear, a last drop of pity. She knew the whole story of Jeanne. From the very first day, if you remember, she had suspected all the misfortune that this fatally indifferent Jehoel, who had killed Dlaide Malgy with despair, would bring to the daughter of Loup de Feuardent and she had warned her.

"Avoid that man," she had been saying to her

for some time with the sort of wildness that she showed at times and that Jeanne-Madelaine believed to be the result of her sorely wounded mind and the frightful solitude of her life. "A voice warns me at night when I am not asleep, a voice which is the voice of Dlaide, that if you do not avoid this man he will some day become your doom. Do not deny it, Jeanne de Feuarent! Should a daughter of gentlemen, those noble warriors, be afraid of a few wounds on a face that knows how to wear them? You are not one of those feeble feminine hearts ever trembling before scars and ready to faint away in vain horror. No! You are a Feuarent, descended from one of those Irish races, so your father told me, who make the new-born baby kiss the edge of a sword before he tastes his mother's milk. No, no steel cuts on a face torn by shells could prevent you from loving Jehoel."

Jeanne did not believe it, or perhaps she did believe it. But she did not avoid the man for whom she felt an interest, grandiose, ideal, and passionate. There was between them, to beautify this riddled face, the tragedy of his very ugliness, the past of their ancestors, the patrician blood which recognized its own kind and leaped to rejoin it, feelings and speech which she could not know in the humble sphere where she lived but of which she had always dreamed. She came oftener to Clotte's. He came, too, and, as I have said, used her for perilous schemes. It was then that Jeanne's love for this civil-war chief, as great in

his way as Georges Cadoudal (of whom they talked a great deal at that time) was in his, deepened, grew poisonous with pain, shame, and despair; for if the Chouan chief had for an instant hidden the priest, the priest reappeared very quickly, severe, icy, imperturbable, the Jehoe! indeed, of whom one might say, as Saint Theresa said of the devil: "Poor wretch! he cannot love!" Jeanne's sufferings were intolerable. She could confide them only to Clotte, who had predicted her misery and told her the story of Dlaide. It was with this pariah scorned by a whole countryside that she made up for the courageous imposture of her pride. Clotte, indeed, the daring impenitent, Haut-Mesnil's mistress, as the peasants in these parts called her, alone understood this love, unacceptable to the tranquil and religious souls who formed opinion in the country.

As to the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, when the project he had so boldly prepared had once more been betrayed by the ill-fortune of his cause, he had become rougher and blacker than ever and ceased to come to Clotte's. He had nothing more to do there. Was not all lost for him? Jeanne-Madelaine never saw the terrible master of her destiny except at church. Had religion recaptured this priest whom the fate of arms rejected? Having abdicated the hope of conquest as Charles V the boredom of governing, did this former monk of Blanchelande build in his own heart a convent vaster and more solitary than the one he had left in his youth, and there in his cold oaken stall,

did he take the measure of the coffin at the bottom of which he lay, still living, and reciting to himself the prayers for the dead? Who knew exactly what stirred in this soul? What is incontestable is, that the sinister and terrible character of the abbé's person augmented before the very eyes of the people, who had always looked upon him as a strange and formidable being, while Jeanne's face marked the torment, the inner wasting to which she was a prey, as if the executioner became more terrible as his victim became more tortured.

Now, the isolation into which the black abbé fell voluntarily after the ruin of his last hopes became the end of Jeanne's courage. But the end of courage for a daughter of *Louisine-of-the-Hatchet* was still a powerful thing. She was one of those natures like Marius, who take their blood in their hands and throw it, as they die, against their enemy, even when that enemy is heaven. There was nothing cowardly or plaintive in this woman's composition when the last rays of the sun tinted her white coif with a melancholy rose on the road to Lessay at that hour when day harmonizes with broken hearts; she felt nothing weak or languishing or enervated in herself. The fullness of her heart was like the burning blush on her face. Only she said to herself, as she laid her strong hand on her heart, which was beating up into her throat, the last outburst was about to come, and after that the volcano would be empty and perhaps smoke no more. This thought more than anything else troubled and

weighed down her bearing, for she had just made the final resolve, which is the supreme act of a desperate will and produces upon an energetic soul the effect that seclusion in the chapel has on the Spaniard condemned to death.

"Ah, there you are, Mother Clotte," she said in a hoarse, hard voice, a voice of great resolution, as she reached the old spinner seated before her wheel at the threshold.

"My God! what new thing has happened, Mademoiselle de Feuardent?" cried Clotte, suddenly struck by Jeanne's voice and manner. "You do not look this evening as you usually do, although all days are sad for you, my noble girl. I might think you were going to do something dreadful. You are as like the figure of Judith who killed Holophernes as one drop of water is like another. I have the picture at my bed's head."

"Ah," said Jeanne, with fierce and ironic exultation, "wait, Mother Clotte, I have no blood upon my hands yet that I should be compared to a murderess; I have it only in my face and that's my own, which burns me but does not flow. If it had flowed since it had been there I should have been happier; I should have been dead and tranquil now like Dlaide Malgy who sleeps so quietly in her tomb down there," she added stretching her trembling arm toward the hedge above which they saw the blue roof of the belfry of Blanchelande tinged by the violet vapors of evening. "No, do not compare me to Judith, Mother Clotte! Do they not

say that the spirit of God was in her? It is the spirit of evil in me and it is so strong this evening, this spirit of evil, known to you, too, Clotilde Mauduit, in your youth, that I want to finish now with life, with reserve, with pride, with virtue, and with everything!"

"Come in, my daughter, they might hear you at the door, and you are talked about enough at Blanchelande," said Clotte almost maternally.

And the paralytic took up her stick beside her and with both hands upon it she crossed the threshold of her door with effort painful to see, like an old adder half crushed by the wheel of a wagon, painfully crossing a rut to regain the bushes opposite.

Jeanne took up the wheel and followed Clotte.

"The distaff is finished," she said, looking at the work of the old woman, whose day had been laborious, "pride is finished, and life is finished. Does everything end except suffering? Who knows," she continued in a somber revery, as she placed the wheel in its usual place, "if the thread wrapped around this spindle may not serve soon to weave the shroud of Jeanne de Feuardent."

"Oh, my poor child," said Clotte, "what is the matter with you this evening?"

"I am going to tell you," replied Jeanne, with an air of mystery which seemed half delirious and half criminal. She sat down on the stool near Clotte, her elbow on her knee and her fiery cheek in her hand, and as if she were beginning an ex-

traordinary tale. "Listen," she said with a wild look, "I love a priest; I love the Abbé Jehoel de la Croix-Jugan!"

Clotte clasped her hands in anguish.

"Alas! I know it well," she said; "thence comes your misery."

"I love him and I am damned," replied the unhappy creature; "for it is an unpardonable sin to love a priest. God cannot pardon such sacrilege. I am damned, but I want him to be damned, too. I want him to fall to the very depths of hell with me. And then hell would be sweet, worth more to me than life. He who feels nothing of what I bear might begin to know what I suffer when the flames of hell warmed up his terrible heart. Ah, you are no saint, Jehoel, and I shall yet drag you down into my eternal perdition! Ah, Clotilde Mauduit, you have seen frightful things in your youth, but you have never seen any like those that are to happen to-night near here. You have only to listen, if you are not asleep to-night; you will hear the soul of Dlaide Malgy cry out louder than all the birds of prey on the Broquebœuf road."

"Hush, Jeanne de Feuarent, my daughter!" interrupted Clotte with a gesture and accent of overpowering tenderness, as she took the head of Jeanne-Madelaine and pressed it against her dry breast with the motion of a mother who seizes a hurt child and tries to prevent its crying.

"Ah, you think I am mad!" said Jeanne more gently, appeased by this fierce caress of a devoted

heart, "and in one sense I am, but in another I am not. I have tried everything to make myself loved by this priest. He did not even notice what I suffered. He scorned me as he did Dlaide Malgy and all of you girls at Haut-Mesnil whom he disdained. Ah well, I will avenge you all. It will cost me my share of Paradise, but I will avenge you. Oh, I have been madder than I am to-day, Mother Clotte. Six months ago—I did not tell you then—I went secretly to the shepherds. For a long time I had laughed at them and their sorceries, but I went there, my head low, my heart low. I recognized the one that I had seen under the portal of the old rectory, who had made the threat that I was never able to forget. I begged him, this beggar, this vagabond, this shepherd, as one ought to beg only God, to have pity upon me and to lift the spell that he had thrown over me. I bent my knees before him in the dust of the moor. If he had wished I would have eaten this dust. I gave him my earrings, my gold cross, my chain, my brooch, and money and everything, and I would have given my very blood for him to show me a way to be loved by Jehoel, if there was one. The miserable, barefoot creature, after many refusals, heightened by hatred and vengeance, ended by telling me that I must wear a shirt on my breast until it was drenched by my sweat and then send it to Jehoel. Will you believe it, Mother Clotte, Jeanne de Feuarden did not take that as an insult! She thought it was a counsel. Love

stultifies us women indeed! I cut and sewed this shirt with my own distracted hands, and I wore it on my body where the mere thought of Jehoel bathed me in fire and soaked it and drenched it. I would have soaked it with my blood if the shepherd had said that blood was needed rather than sweat. Then one evening when the door of Jehoel's house was half open and I had heard him talking in the stable to the horses, the only living creatures whom he seems to love, I slipped in like a thief and threw the shirt upon his bed, hoping that, without thinking, he would put it on when he found it there under his hand. Did he put it on? I do not know; but if he did put it on, he did not put on love with it! Alas! he does not love me any the better."

"It ought not to have been dry," said the shepherd, grinning and turning the knife in my heart. This was asking the impossible. The shepherd was avenged. But the veil that I had before my eyes fell. I no longer went to the shepherd. And yet credulity held me still. I consulted all the fortune tellers at the fairs and markets. They never said but one thing, that I loved a dark man who had a power greater than theirs and that this dark man would kill me. But I was already killed! Am I the Jeanne de Feuardent once known at Blanchelande and at Lessay? Does this unhappy face, frightful as that of an apoplectic, speak of a living woman? Yes, I am killed; Jehoel has killed me, but I will kill his soul! I will not end tamely like that

miserable pigeon Dlaide Malgy, who could only roll at the feet of a man and then die."

A strange smile passed over the lips of the former odalisk of the sultans of Haut-Mesnil as she heard this cry of a woman who knows the force of the temptation which her sin exercises.

"You mad woman!" she said. "You mad woman! You do not know this Croix-Jugan yet!" and with a glance full of power and authority, which troubled Jeanne, despite the disorder of her whole being, she added: "Though you should put yourself lower than Malgy at the feet of this man you will never obtain what you wish!"

"Is he not a man, then?" asked Jeanne, with a brazen face, for the pure sentiments of womanhood, the chaste honor of all her life, had disappeared in the fire of a passion stronger, alas! than fifteen years of wise living, and inflamed by eighteen months of atrocious combats.

"He is a priest," Clotte replied.

"The angels fell!" said Jeanne.

"They fell through pride," replied the old woman; "none of them fell through love."

There was a moment of silence between the two women. Night charged with evil thoughts began to penetrate Clotte's hut.

"He loves vengeance," Jeanne-Madelaine said musingly, "and I am the wife of a Blue."

"Who knows what he loves, my daughter?" Clotte replied more seriously still. "Perhaps he has never loved anything but the cause and his cause is not

in your arms. Ah, perhaps if he could crush all the Blues at once under your mattress he might sleep with you. Yes, even as he came out from mass with his mouth still tinged with the blood of God which would condemn him. But you, by yourself, have nothing but a heart which he, as a priest, disdains as the predestined prey of the worms in the tomb."

"Ah, if you were mistaken, Clotte?" said Jeanne, rising impetuously from the stool.

"No, Jeanne de Feuardent," said old Clotte with a gesture of Hecuba, "no, I am not mistaken. I know him. Do not lower yourself for this man. Keep your high heart. Do not descend to shame, my daughter, for you will be beaten back by scorn." She caught Jeanne by the hem of her red cotton apron to prevent her going.

"Age has made you cowardly, Clotilde Mauduit," said Jeanne, exasperated, the last flickering of reason extinguished. "When you were my age and were in love, would you have trembled with shame, and could they have stopped you by speaking of scorn?"

She snatched away her apron, and it tore and left a piece in Clotte's clutching hands.

She rushed out of the hut like a mad woman escaping from an asylum.

Chapter Eleven

THE same evening, almost the same hour when Clotte seated at her door had seen Jeanne-Madeleine coming toward her, Maître Thomas Le Harduey, mounted on his strong well-gaited mare, was crossing the moor at Lessay. He was coming back from Coutances, where he had spent several days making arrangements with a company of property-buyers whose association later bore the expressive name of The Black Band. Although he had made what are called good bargains with his associates and had every reason to congratulate himself, Thomas Le Hardouey had not on this day, in this manner and face, that inexpressible look which makes one say at a glance in all security and conscience, "That's a lucky fellow passing!" It is true that he never had had one of those gay, frank faces like Maître Louis Tainnebouy's, which are like a wide-open door to the soul where everyone may enter.

On the contrary, never more than this evening had his sulky and frowning face resembled the fagots of nettles and thorns which fill up the holes in the hedge to bar out animals. His hard features, wan and lined, were not softened by the tints of warm and golden light of the sun disappearing over the horizon of the moor, like a shining courier

who had been crossing it all day. For some time, despite the flourishing state of a fortune steadily increasing, Maître Le Hardouey harbored a gloomy mood caused by the health and mental condition of his wife. Several times he had taken her to the doctor at Coutances, who understood very little of Jeanne's sufferings, that nameless state which, like all maladies whose germ is in our souls, deceives the limited eye of material observation. "What was the matter with his wife, that pearl of women?" as they said in the countryside. This was a fixed idea with Le Hardouey.

One day when he was crossing this very moor he had surprised her seated on the ground, her face, her almost haughty face, bathed in tears, weeping like Hagar in the desert. And when he questioned her she had fallen into a rigid fit in which he feared she was dead. Then he determined not to ask her the slightest question. But with that suppressed anger which was all the resignation he could muster, he could not accept seeing this housekeeper once so vigilant and active let go, little by little, everything which had filled and dominated her life, so that everything at the Close was going to rack and ruin. Jeanne, devoured by a mute passion, had fallen into a stupor which really seemed like the beginning of paralysis. Add to this her visits to Clotte, her meetings at the shorn old hag's, as Le Hardouey called her in his former Jacobin language, with this Chouan who was gossiped about

all over the countryside, and finally the remarks picked up like crumbs to right and to left from every one, and you will have the secret of the trouble which deepened the lines on Maître Thomas's forehead.

He was keeping to the middle of the moor and his horse moved along at a good pace. He did not want night to overtake him in these parts, then at the height of their evil renown, though their aspect even to-day troubles the most intrepid hearts. Well advanced toward the side of Blanchelande, he calculated, as he spurred on his mount, how much daylight remained to him to get out of the stretch, after the sun should have entirely disappeared; it was now only a point of gold trembling in the place of the horizon "where earth and sky kiss each other when the weather is clear," as a great landscape painter has said. The day, which had been magnificent and hot, was finishing on this opaque and motionless grey sea, this deserted moor, with the languorous majesty of melancholy which the close of day has in mid-ocean. No living being, man or beast, enlivened the dreary stretch, like the thick surface of a caldron which had thrown a froth of vermilion liquid over its rim on to the horizon. A profound silence reigned over the space, broken only by the tread of his well-gaited mare or the monotonous buzzing of some gadfly biting at its mane. Maître Thomas trotted along, lost in thought, his head sagging over his stomach and his back round

as a bag of wheat, when a breath of wind blowing in his face brought him the broken sounds of a human voice and made him raise his mistrustful eyes. He looked all round him, but far or near he saw nothing but the moor in a half-hidden cloud of rising dust. Strong-minded as was Thomas Le Hardouey, these human sounds without bodies, in this country filled with the chimeras and monsters of the popular imagination, produced a singular and new effect upon him and doubtless prepared him for the unheard-of scene which was to follow. The further he advanced the louder became the voice on the path which his horse followed with shivering ears, rearing and dancing to match the strained nerves of his rider.

The shining purple of the setting sun had become a keener red, and as the red light darkened the voice rose louder and became distinct, as if the sounds came out of the earth like will-o'-the-wisps rising from a swamp at night. The sounds, moreover, were more sad than alarming. Le Hardouey had often heard them droned from the lips of spinning women. It was a sort of vagabond's complaint and he distinguished the following couplets:

We are more than five hundred beggars,

All five hundred in a band, ¹ ₂

I am the luckiest among them, ³

For I am the one to command.

My throne is under a bush,

My sceptre, the staff I push.

Tirri, lirri, lo,

La lo, la lo, la lo.

Along all roads I travel,
One town behind, one ahead,
One man gives me a piece of cheese,
Another a piece of bread;
And sometimes, perhaps mistaken,
Hands out a bit of bacon.
Tirri, lirri, lo;
La lo, la lo, la lo.

I never need to be afraid
Of rolling out of my bed,
Or that the heat of the blankets
Should send the blood to my head.
I lie on the cold stone,
My knapsack by me, alone.
Tirri, lirri, lo;
La lo, la lo, la lo.

At the last *lo* of this couplet Le Hardouey reached one of those mounds of land which I had, if you remember, noticed when I was crossing with Louis Tainnebouy, and he became aware of three evil-looking men lying flat on the earth like reptiles entirely hidden by the rise of earth as a barque is hidden by a billow. Despite the beggar's song which one of them was singing and the costume they wore, which was the age-long dress of beggars in the countryside, they were not beggars, but shepherds. They had hempen-colored blouses, unlaced sabots stuffed with straw, big hats yellowed by the rain, wallets and long forked iron tipped sticks. Lassos of shining gold straw solidly woven, with which they caught stubborn pigs by the feet or headstrong oxen by the horns in order to lead them, were wound around their arms like huge bracelets and they also had

more ropes of straw, which they bound like shoulder straps over their wallets and around their waists above their belts. By the immobility of their attitude, their blond hair like osier bark, by the sleepiness of their vague and heavy look, it was easy to recognize the vagrant shepherds, the *lazzaroni* of the Norman moors, those men of eternal indolence.

When they heard behind them and near them the sound of Le Hardouey's horse, which trotted up to the group without seeing them, the nearest one half arose, leaning on his stick which he set up, and by this gesture startled the mare, which shied.

"Snakes!" Thomas Le Hardouey shouted, recognizing the errant tribe which he had banished from the farm, "do you hide there like drunken dogs to frighten the horses of honest men as they pass by? Accursed pests! Will the country never be purged of you?"

But the one who had risen up, leaning on his stick stuck into the earth, fell back and, crouching on the iron heels of his sabots, fixed upon Le Hardouey an open and steady look like a toad's. It was the shepherd whom Jeanne had met under the portal of the old parsonage. He bore a name mysterious, like himself and all of his race. They called him "The Shepherd." No one in the countryside knew him by any other name and perhaps he had none.

"Why shouldn't I lie here?" he replied. "The earth belongs to everybody!" he added with a sort

of savage pride as if he were proclaiming in advance from the depths of his dust the menacing axiom of modern communism. He was crouched on the heels of his sabots, his staff stuck into the earth like a lance—the lance of the division of spoils, at the foot of which shall one day be accomplished the dispossession of all humankind. This man would doubtless have struck the eyes of an observer or an artist. His two companions, stretched on their bellies like animals wallowing in straw or beasts rampant on a shield, did not move any more than the Sphinx in the desert, but eyed the farmer on horseback with their four eyes hidden under their whitish eyebrows. Maître Le Hardouey saw nothing in all this but a group of three indolent shepherds, insolent and sly, real human lepers whom he defied from the height of his horse, with his own strength; he was not timid, Le Hardouey, and he could lift a bushel of wheat from the back of a horse as easily as he could take his wife down in her bouffant petticoats! That was why he was not frightened of these three do-nothings with their albino coloring who barred his path in this part of the moor, with their long bodies like molluscs—and nevertheless—yes, nevertheless—was it the hour? Was it the reputation of the place where he was? Was it the superstitions which surrounded these contemplative shepherds whose origin was as unknown as that of the wind or the home of old moons? It is certain that Le Hardouey did not feel as much at ease in his saddle with its copper

pummels as he did before the fire at the Close with a pot of his famous bottled cider in front of him, and really for him as for anyone else this wan group flat on the earth, obliquely lighted by a livid red sunset, had something fascinating about it, with its surprising immobility and its strange brick-dust shadows.

"Come!" he said, wishing only to frighten them and reacting now against the shivering impression which they had caused him. "Come, get up here, Ha'pence! Get along, you race of numb vipers! Clear my way, or ——"

He did not finish, but he cracked the leather lash on its ash stick handle and with the tip he flicked the shoulder of the shepherd in front of him.

"Keep your hands off!" said the shepherd, with a phosphorescent light in his eyes. "There is a road at the side, Maître Le Hardouey. Do not ride your horse over us or harm will befall you!"

And as Le Hardouey urged on his mare, he stretched out his iron staff under the horse's nose till it reared back, snorting. Le Hardouey turned pale with anger and lifted up his ash club, calling upon the Holy Name.

"I am not afraid of your Talbot rages, Maître Le Hardouey," said the shepherd calmly, with a fierce and concentrated joy, "for I can bring you as low, and break your heart as completely if I would, as I did your wife's; she was very haughty once."

"My wife?" said Le Hardouey, troubled, and lowering his stick.

"Truly your wife; she's your other half in arrogance and all and her pride now is as crushed as this!" he replied, striking a piece of earth with his iron stick and pulverizing it. "Ask her if she knows the shepherd of the old Rectory and see what she answers you."

"You dog of a beggar!" cried Maître Le Hardouey. "What intercourse could there possibly be between my wife and a lousy herd of leprous swine like you?"

But the shepherd opened his wallet and took out, after searching, an object which shone in his dirty hand. "Don't you know that?" he asked.

The evening was still bright enough for Le Hardouey to see quite clearly a gold enamel brooch which he had brought his wife from Guibray and which Jeanne wore usually to fasten her coif at the back of her head.

"Where did you steal that?" he asked, jumping down from his mare with the movement of a man suddenly seized by a thought that will drag him down to hell.

"Steal!" replied the shepherd, beginning to snicker. "You know whether I have stolen it, you fellows!" he added, turning to his companions, who began to snicker with the same guttural laugh. "Mistress Le Hardouey gave it to me herself at the edge of the moor toward Butte-Aux-Taupes and pestered me enough to take it. Ah, her pride was gone.

She groaned like a pauper who is hungry, howling at a farm door. Truly she was hungry, but for what bread! for the blessed bread which, do what he would, the shepherd could not give her."

Thomas Le Hardouey understood all too well. A cold sweat which he had to hide poured down his furrowed face at the insult. The rumors that had come to him about his wife, vague, it is true, inconsistent and unprecise, like all rumors that come back, were then positive and bold, since these miserable shepherds repeated them. The blest bread was the odious priest! But who would ever have thought it? Jeanne-Madelaine, that woman of such great good sense, had dealings with these shepherds! She had had recourse to their assistance! Humiliation of humiliations! The knife which struck his heart went in to the handle and he could not draw it out.

"You lie! Son of a bitch!" said Le Hardouey, gripping the leather handle of his ash stick in his clenched fist. "You must prove what you say to me instantly!"

"Surely!" replied the imperturbable shepherd, a strange light beginning to shine in his green eyes, like a fire one sees kindling at night behind a dirty pane. "But what will you pay me, Maître Le Hardouey, if I show you that what I told you is the plain and simple truth?"

"Whatever you like!" replied the peasant, eaten up by the desire which ruins those who feel it, the desire to read fate.

"Ah, well!" said the shepherd. "Come near, sir, and look in!"

He drew from the wallet out of which he had taken the brooch, a small mirror, about as big as a village barber's mirror, framed in blackened lead and crossed from left to right by a crack. The quicksilver was livid with a corpse-like glitter. It is true that the red bands of a sunset turned windy were dying out and that the moor was getting dark.

"What have you got there?" said Le Hardouey. "I can no longer see——"

"Squat there and watch all the same," said the shepherd. "Do not tire——"

And the other shepherds, attracted by the magic, grouped themselves round their companion, and all three of them, with Maître Thomas, who had passed the bridle of his frightened and pulling mare over his arm, were close together, their heads huddled over the mirror darkened by the shadow of their big hats.

"Keep watching," said the shepherd.

And he began to speak strange words softly, words unknown to Thomas Le Hardouey, who trembled till his teeth chattered with impatience and curiosity and, despite his muscular strength and coarse disdain of all belief, with a kind of supernatural fear.

"Do you see anything now?" said the shepherd.

"Yes," replied Le Hardouey, wrapt in attention and apprehension, "I begin——"

"Tell what you see," replied the shepherd.

"Oh, I see—it's like a room," said the big proprietor of the Close; "it's a room I do not know. Stop! There is a red light there like that on the moor a little while ago."

"Keep watching," said the shepherd monotonously.

"Ah, now," said Le Hardouey, after a silence, "I see people in the room. There are two of them seated by a fireplace, but their backs are turned and the red light which brightened the room is dying away."

"Come! Watch. Do not tire," went on the shepherd who was holding the mirror.

"Now I see again!" said the farmer. "There is a flame there. They must have lighted something. Oh, it's the fire in the chimney place." But Thomas Le Hardouey's voice strangled and his body was seized by convulsive trembling.

"You have to tell what you see," said the implacable shepherd; "otherwise it will vanish."

"'Tis they," said Le Hardouey with the feeble voice of a man about to die. "What are they doing down there by that flaming fire? Oh, they are moving—the spit is on and is turning."

"What is on the spit that is turning?" asked the shepherd, with his icy voice, a stony voice, the voice of destiny. "I tell you you must not tire. Keep watching. We are near the end."

"I do not know," said Le Hardouey, panting. "I do not know. It looks like a heart—and God damn

me! I believe it jumped on the spit when my wife pricked it with the point of her knife."

"Yes, it's a heart they are cooking," said the shepherd, "and it's yours, Maître Thomas Le Hardouey."

The vision was so horrible that Le Hardouey felt as though he were struck on the head by a club and he fell to the earth like a stunned ox. In falling he became entangled in the horse's bridle which he held with his strong and powerful body. Doubtless without this obstacle the frightened horse would have galloped away "striking fire from the flints," as my friend Tainnebouy said, since for a long time the nervous animal had felt the stress of fear and was bathed in foam.

When Maître Le Hardouey came to himself it was late and the night was dark. The warlock shepherds had disappeared. Le Hardouey saw a little fire on the ground. Was it a bit of tinder that the shepherds had left behind when they had lighted their copper pipes? He had not the courage to go and put out the little fire with his iron heel. He wanted to mount his horse, and felt about a long time for the stirrup. He was trembling, and the horse, too. Finally by dint of feeling about in the dark the man bestrode his horse. It was a trembling upon a trembling. The horse, scenting the stable, carried away his rider as a tempest carries away a straw, and Le Hardouey almost broke his bridle when he stopped her before the door of a house, half forge, half inn, which stood along the road

at the edge of the moor, called in the neighborhood the forge of Dussaucey.

The old smith was still working, although it was ten o'clock at night, for he had a lot of horseshoes to deliver to Coutances horseshoers the next day.

The smith himself, in telling the story, said that he did not recognize the voice of Le Hardouey when he was called to the door and asked for a glass of brandy. The old smith took the bottle from the smoky shelf, poured out the dose that was asked, and brought it to Maître Thomas, who drank it eagerly without taking his foot from the stirrup. The village Cyclops had placed the end of a dripping and smoky candle on the stone by his door and by this trembling light he perceived that Le Hardouey's mare was drenched like a piece of linen that had been dipped in the river.

"Why do you maltreat your best mare like that?" he asked the proprietor of the Close, who did not reply, and mute as a black statue held out his empty glass with a gloomy air to be filled again. "He was a customer, Maître Le Hardouey," said the old smith himself to Louis Tainnebouy, in his youth, "and he was a bit touchy after the manner of great people, although he was nothing but rich. I poured him out a second drink and then a third, but he swallowed them so quickly that at the fourth I looked at him fixedly and said: 'You are panting, you and your mare, like the great bellows of my forge, and you are drinking brandy as a red-hot iron would drink well water. Has anything hap-

pened to you on the moor this evening?' Not a breath of response. And he tossed off the drinks so many and so fast that he came quick to the bottom of the jug. When he had finished, 'That is all,' I said, grinning, for I didn't feel much like laughing. His manner froze me like ice. 'It is so and so much, Maître Thomas,' I said. But he did not put his hand into his purse, but disappeared like lightning as if the brandy he had swallowed had passed into the belly of his steed. After all, I was not disturbed about the money. We were bound to meet again, as they say. But when I reëntered the forge I said to Pierre Cloud, my apprentice, who was at the anvil: 'I tell you, lad, there is certainly some misfortune hatching at Blanchelande. You will see, my son! There goes Le Hardouey back to the Close as frightened as Cain. I could swear that he is carrying a murder in the scowl between his eyebrows.' "

Chapter Twelve

MAÎTRE THOMAS LE HARDOUEY, when he reëntered the Close, found in place of his wife a great commotion, for Jeanne-Madelaine was not usually so late. She had been gone since the Angelus which rings at seven o'clock in the evening. As they thought she was lost, they had sent out several of the farm men with lanterns to search for her in different directions. When Maître Thomas arrived in the courtyard of the Close everyone noticed that he did not get down from his horse to ask for his wife, and that, paying no attention to the anxieties of his people, he went out quickly from the court on the same mare that he had ridden in, a prey to one of the somber rages that tell no secrets but bite their lips in silence.

The house where he believed her to be, where he arrived at a gallop, was blacker than the shadows which surrounded it, and its oaken shutters were tightly closed and the door with its heavy panels allowed no ray of light to escape from the inside which might reveal the life of the watch inside. Le Hardouey beat quick upon it with the heaviest blows he had ever given with his Cotentin stick. Then he beat on the window shutters as he had beaten on the door. He called, swore, cursed, and

knocked again; but blows and noise beat against the house and the silence without arousing the one or the other. The house resisted. The silence was but profounder after the noise. Brandy and rage boiled together under Maître Thomas's scalp. He exhausted himself in terrible efforts. He even tried to set fire to the door, firm and strong as the door of a citadel, with his flint and steel, but the tinder went out. Then such a violent fury as a man can only feel once in his life came over him. That spit which was turning, that heart which was cooking, would not away from his thoughts; he still saw them. Yes, he really felt the point of Jeanne's knife in his living heart, just as it happened in the mirror, and he jumped under the pricks of the knife as the red heart jumped over the fire on its prong! His mare, which he had not tied, went back alone to the Close.

The brandy he had drunk, perhaps, and his powerless rage (for nothing so fatigues the brain as the impossibility of quieting it) threw him into a profound sleep at the end of an hour, a sort of apoplectic sleep on the stone where he had sat with the obstinacy of a bulldog, and there he slept unbrokenly that dreamless sleep that annihilates the entire being. But toward four o'clock this countryman, always an early riser, was awakened by the keen cold of the morning. The dew had penetrated his clothing. He was nailed down by pains in all his joints. When he came to consciousness he opened his bewildered eyes, flooded once more with black anger, upon that house where he believed his faithless wife

and the accursed Chouan to be. It was a singular thing, but since he believed himself betrayed by Jeanne, the idea of the Chouan stifled the idea of the priest in him, and it was the Blue rather than the husband who demanded vengeance. The house of old Bouet, leased by the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, appeared in the early morning light like a coffer of bluish granite with its firm strong lines, and no vines about it. It seemed to sleep with closed shutters like a woman with closed eyelids. Maître Thomas began to knock again with redoubled force. He made several turns around the square house like a wild beast, stopped by a wall, trying to slip through some opening. The house seemed like a tomb having nothing in common with life. It was a petrified irony. Ah, how often are we insulted by things with their eternal and stupid calm, we, creatures of inflamed clay, dissolving in vain, alongside them, in the fury of our desires, and then we can understand the story of a sacrilegious madman who, in an access of impious resentment, fired pistol-shots against heaven!

Nevertheless, toward five o'clock Thomas Le Hardouey saw the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan's house-keeper, old Simone Mahé, from down in the village of Blanchelande, coming toward the house where he was still on guard and knocking. "Ah!" he said. "The damned door will be opened now!" The astonishment of Simone Mahé was unbounded when she saw Maître Thomas there.

"Well," she said, "did you want something of

M. de la Croix-Jugan, Maître Thomas Le Hardouey? He will be very sorry not to have been here, but he went to Montsurvent yesterday evening."

"When did he start?" asked Le Hardouey, recalling the hour when on the moor he gazed into the shepherd's fatal mirror.

"My faith! it was already night," replied Mahé, "and he had no idea of leaving home that evening. I left him saying his breviary by the corner of the fire; but he is so active a man and his head gives his body so much to do that he often says to me 'I shall not go out this evening, Simone,' and the next morning I find him gone, the key of the house under the stone where we agreed to put it, to be found when either one of us comes in. Only last night he did not disappear like smoke without one seeing him or knowing where he had gone, for I met him about ten o'clock on his black horse, passing the edge of the village. I could recognize that horse's step and his way of snorting if I could see no more than a mole and were as blind as Crépin's son, so that I could say to myself, 'That must be the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan who is passing.' He can see like a cat in the dark, for he was a Chouan, you know, and he said to me in a voice of command which stops your breath when he speaks: 'Is that you, Simone? Madame the Countess of Montsurvent, who is ill, has sent to fetch me, and I am going. You will find the key of the house in the ordinary place.' Come, my dear

M. Le Hardouey, come with me and look there under this stone. You are no thief and I can tell you this is where he puts the key, and you see, there it is." And in fact she took the key from under a stone in the little wall of the court and, turning it in the lock, they entered together, he as well as she. She to do her accustomed work, and he, obeying some strange instinct of distrust, desiring to see.

Built fundamentally like all Norman houses was this house of old Bouet's, leased by the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan. On the ground floor it had a little corridor with two rooms, one to the right and one to the left, forming the kitchen and parlour and on the first floor above, two bedrooms. Simone Mahé and Le Hardouey entered the rooms downstairs, and when she had thrown open the shutters Le Hardouey looking around with eager curiosity, recognized the room in the mirror which was not effaced from his memory, so that he saw it whenever he closed his eyes.

"You are as pale as death," said Simone. "Is there anything wrong at your house, Maître Le Hardouey that you have come so early to speak to M. the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan? What is it? Is anyone ill at the Close? You know," she added with that mysterious air people have in speaking of serious matters, "that the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan does not hear confession. He is suspended."

But Le Hardouey was not listening to her chatter. He went up to the fireplace and with the end of his stick he raked the cinders and ashes about with

so fierce and preoccupied an air that Mahé began to be afraid.

"Yes," he said, believing himself alone and talking aloud as if in terrible preoccupation, "there is the fire in which they cooked my heart, and it was beneath the crucifix that they ate it!"

With a blow of his club he struck the crucifix furiously, brought it down, and, having pushed it into the ashes, he went out, swearing furiously. Mahé, as she said herself, felt her legs and arms limp after such a scene. She thought Le Hardouey was a prey to some abominable demon. She made the sign of the cross in terror, but, her fear augmenting in this solitude, she hastened to get away.

"The bed has not been opened," she said, "and if I remain here alone any longer, I believe in my soul that I shall die of fright."

Going home, she met Mother Ingou and her little girl, who were going to wash their poor linen at the washing place. They said good day. The washing place was not on the road which Simone Mahé had to take to get to the edge of the village, but gossip, which is to old women what the iron ring in his nose by which he is led is to a buffalo, made Mahé take the road to the wash-house with the other gossip.

"I have nothing to do," she said. "The Abbé went to Montsurvent yesterday evening. If you want me to help you, Mother Ingou, I can beat a little at the washing."

And she went with them, less to help, though she

was not lacking in the kindness that poor people show one another, than to tell her what was burning her tongue, what she called the madness of Thomas Le Hardouey.

"As you came along," she said, "did you meet Maître Le Hardouey, Mother Ingou? I found him, at the stroke of dawn, standing at the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan's door, paler than the linen that you have on your back, and with wild eyes. 'What should a man without any religion, who buys up priests' property, a terrorist, want at that hour of M. de la Croix-Jugan?' I said to myself aside; but my poor legs tremble when I think of it! it was his manner! He came in with me, into the Abbé's room and then——"

And she told what she had seen, but with new and more horrible details on her gossip's tongue, for gossip sings away to itself like birds—a language in which the responsibility of these poor wretches (as Christians we must believe so, at any rate) counts for nothing.

"Ah," said Mother Ingou, "I believe indeed that you would have been afraid! but you know, Mother Mahé, what is said about the wife of Maître Le Hardouey and the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan. And it was doubtless that which roused Le Hardouey so early in the morning."

Then they never stopped any more. They overflowed. Like everyone else at Blanchelande and at Lessay, they had heard rumors of the gossip about the former monk and this Mistress Le Hardouey

whom they had once seen so brilliant in health and understanding, now fallen, without their knowing what was the matter, into a state so worthy of pity. They asked the child who followed them, carrying the grey soap and the paddles, how many times she had seen Jeanne-Madelaine and the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan at Clotte's; what they did when they were there. But the little girl knew nothing at all. The old women's imagination did not hesitate on that account, and they filled up all the spaces that were left by the young child's depositions.

Gossiping thus, they arrived at last at the washing pond, by the side of the road, at the end of a little field which sloped down to this natural washing place, which men had not dug. It was only a little pond of rain water quite deep, on a pebbly bottom.

"Look! There is some one there already if my old eyes do not deceive me," said Mother Ingou, entering the field. "The stone is taken and we will have to wait."

"It is not a washwoman, Mother Ingou," said Simone, "for we would have heard the noise of the beating as we came along."

"No, no! It's a shepherd of the old Rectory and he is sharpening his knife on the washing stone," said little Ingou, whose sharp little eyes could discover the smallest birds' nests in the trees.

"He is not leaving the country, then?" said Mother Mahé to her companion.

Neither one nor the other of them liked these

shepherds, mistrusted by the whole countryside, but wretchedness binds its children together and with its lean arms holds them close in life as its sister death holds them in the tomb. These wandering shepherds caused less fright in the ragged folk like these two women than in rich people with herds of cattle whose milk they might turn with their spells and fields in which they sometimes beat down the wheat in a night. That one of these sinister shepherds should be there at the very moment when they thought him far away did not frighten them particularly, and they went down the slope of the field to him.

Moreover, when they reached the washing place he had already finished sharpening his knife on the stone where the washwomen beat and wrung their linen and was drying it in the grass.

"You come at a lucky moment, Mother Ingou," said the shepherd, then to the good woman, "and if you are not afraid of dipping your linen into the waters of death, there is your stone. Wash!"

"What do you mean by the waters of death, Shepherd?" said Mother Ingou, who lacked neither common sense nor courage. "Do you think you can scare us?"

"Not at all!" said the shepherd. "Do as you please. But I tell you, that if you dip your linen in here, it will smell of a carcass for a long time, even after it is dry!"

"That is an ugly thing to say so early in the morning, in the good God's blessed sunlight," said

the good woman with a naïve poetry of which she was certainly not conscious. "Leave us in peace, Shepherd! I have never seen the water so beautiful as it is this morning."

And in truth the pond framed on one side by grass was shining with lovely agate reflections under the opal sky of the summer dawn. Its smooth pure surface had not a ripple nor a spot nor a cloud. As to the other side of the pond, the rain water which formed it was not contained here by a basin paved on purpose and it lost itself in a sort of big ditch grown over by weeds, cresses, and water-lilies.

"Truly," said the shepherd, while Mother Ingou was untying her package at the edge of the washing place and Simone Mahé and the little girl, less courageous, began to look with anxiety at this shepherd of evil omen, standing up there in front of them—"truly the water is beautiful like many things, to the first glance, but at bottom—bad! just now when I was honing my knife on this stone, I said to myself: 'This water smells of death and will spoil my bread,' and that is why you saw me wiping it so hard on the grass and sticking it so hard into the earth, for the earth is good when you have crossed the meadow. Believe me or not, Mother Ingou," he said, stretching out his stick with burning certainty toward the pond, "but I am as sure as I am of my life that there is something, beast or man, dead and beginning to rot in this water."

Leaning over on his staff, he bent toward the

limpid surface and took up in his hand from this diaphanous water a handful, and held it close to Mother Ingou's face:

"Old people are stubborn!" he said ironically, "but if you are not buggy, judge yourself, old mule, if this water does not smell bad."

"Go along!" said Mother Ingou. "It is your hand that smells bad, shepherd, not the water."

Lifting up her petticoats, she knelt down near the polished stone and dipped a part of the linen that she had carried on her back into the water; then turning round, she said to Simone and her little girl:

"Well! Are you frozen? Get to your work, little girl! Upon my soul, Mother Mahé, I thought you had more courage than that."

And she plunged her arms and hands into the water fresh as dew which fell back into a thousand silver sparkles around her paddle.

Simone Mahé and the little girl approached and decided to follow her example, but they looked like cats in front of a puddle, who do not know how to get over without wetting their paws.

"Now where is the shepherd?" said Mother Ingou, looking behind her between two blows of her paddle that the morning echo repeated. All three of them looked about, but he was no longer there. He had disappeared as if he had flown.

"He must have had a four-leafed clover under his tongue to make him invisible, for he was here just now and he is gone," said Mother Mahé,

haunted this morning by all sorts of terrors. She was like an old pin-cushion full of pins in which one can always put one more.

"Do you believe in such nonsense?" replied Mother Ingou, wringing the linen in her dry hands. "A four-leafed clover! Who ever saw a four-leafed clover? What an idea! They chattered enough in Blanchelande when goodman Bouet went one day with one of these shepherds who pass for warlocks to find one of these so-called four-leafed clovers and vervain in the Centesous oak grove—after midnight—by moonlight and walking backward!"

"Laughing does not change things," said Mother Mahé. "Yes, truly I believe in four-leaf clovers. And why not? My dead father, who wasn't born yesterday, often told me there were such things . . ."

But all of a sudden they were interrupted by the guttural laugh of the shepherd. He had walked around the bit of water, almost circular, without their seeing him, and showed his pale face above the reeds, which were quite high on that side.

"Oh-ho, washwomen!" he cried to them. "Look here and see if I was not right when I said the water was rotten. Do you know this?"

And above the pond he held out a white object hanging to his iron-tipped staff.

"Holy Virgin!" cried Mother Ingou. "It is Jeanne Le Hardouey's coif!"

"Oh, good God, have mercy on us!" added Simone. "There has never been another coif just like it in Blanchelande, and there it is! What horror, my

God! It is certain that she who wore it is drowned and must be at the bottom of the pond!"

And at the risk of falling in themselves, they leaned over the surface and reached the torn white cap which hung on the shepherd's staff. They looked at it. It was indeed Jeanne's coif, the edges picoted and embroidered, with its big wings and its beautiful Caen lace. They touched it, held it up to their eyes, admired it, and lamented; and soon connecting the loss of the woman with the loss of the coif they burst forth in all sorts of lamentations.

As for the shepherd, he had gone up to his knees in the water and was sounding the pond all about him with his stick.

"She is not on your side. She is there," he cried out to the three women who were weeping on the other bank. "She is there! I have got her! I feel her under my staff. Come, Mother Ingou, come here! You are the bravest and the strongest. If I could get my staff underneath her I could raise her from the mud of the bottom and bring her to the bank, which is not high on this side. Perhaps we could do it together."

And Mother Ingou left the coif in Simone's and the little girl's hands and ran to the shepherd. What he predicted happened. With great effort he raised the body of the drowned woman and laid it against the bank.

"Wait! I see her!" said Mother Ingou, pushing aside the weeds; and lying down on the grass and

plunging her hands into the water of the pool, she seized poor Jeanne by the hair.

"Oh, how heavy she is!" she said, calling the child and Simone to her aid: and all three together succeeded, with the shepherd's help, in drawing out the bluish body of Jeanne-Madelaine and laying it in the meadow grass.

"Well," said the shepherd, almost menacing, "did the water lie? Are you sure now of what I said, Mother Ingou? Do you believe in the power of the shepherds now?" He pointed at Jeanne's corpse and said: "She, too, did not wish to believe in it, but she ended by feeling it; and her husband, who was richer and worse than she, believes in it too since yesterday evening, more than in God!"

"What do you mean by that, Shepherd?" said the good woman.

"I say what I say," said the shepherd. "The Hardouey's drove out the shepherds from the Close and to-day the shepherds have avenged themselves. There is the woman drowned and the man——"

"The man?" interrupted Mahé, who had just left Maître Le Hardouey a moment ago.

"The man," continued the shepherd, "is running around the country right now, like a horse with a buzzing gnat in his ears."

The two gossips shuddered. The shepherd's tone was more terrible than the power he spoke of, in which they were beginning to believe, struck as they were by the horrible spectacle under their eyes.

"Truly," he cried, "there she is, dead, lying at

my feet, a mass of filth!" and with his impious sabot he kicked the beautiful body, once upright and so proud. "Once she thought of changing fate and appeasing me by offering me black bread and salt pork as she might have given it to a beggar, hiding it from her husband, but I would none of it! only fate!—and fate threw her here! Oh, she met it! And I knew what had her in its grip when no one else suspected it in Blanchelande and in Lessay. I knew she would come to a bad end. But when I whetted my knife here and cleaned it in the earth that it might not smell of death, I did not know that it was she who was rotting the water. If I had I would not have wiped my blade; I would have liked to find the taste of vengeance on it stronger than the taste of bread."

With trembling hands he took the knife he was speaking of from his wallet, opened it, and plunged it impetuously into the waters of the pool. He drew it out dripping and plunged it in again. Never did a drunken assassin watch the blood of his victim run down the steel of his poignard as he watched the water running down the handle of the blade of this ignoble and common knife. Then, frantic, beside himself, as if delirious at the sight, he raised it to his lips and at the risk of cutting them he drew his tongue the whole length of the blade, his tongue glittering with the thirst of an infernal vengeance. He accompanied the licking with a ferocious snarling. With his square head, his yellow hair on end, and his muzzle stretched out as he drank so

avidly this water which had so frightful a savor for him, he seemed like a strayed wolf passing through a village at night that stopped panting to lap up a patch of blood filtering under the ill-fitted door of a butcher's unclean stall.

"It is good, that!" he said. "It is good!" he murmured, and as if these drops upon his avid tongue had awakened a new thirst in him, more difficult to assuage, he took up some water in his hand, without letting go of his knife, and drank it at one gulp.

"Oh, that is the best drink that I have ever drunk in my life!" he cried in an exultant voice, and with horrible irony he added: "I drink it to your health, Jeanne Le Hardouey, damned by a priest! It tastes of your accursed flesh and it would have been better if you had rotted longer in this water where you drowned yourself!"

And frightful libation! he drank it frantically several times. He leaned over the pond to get it and rose up and leaned down again and his movements were so convulsive one might have thought he had Saint Vitus's dance. The water intoxicated him. "*Sup! sup!*" he said as he drank it, talking to himself in his savage patois. "*Sup!*"

His face, like crushed ceruse, had a diabolical expression, so that the old women believed that the devil, though ordinarily he only wanders over the earth by night, was manifesting himself, pale in this light of broad day, and they fled to Blanchelande to call for help, leaving their linen behind.

Chapter Thirteen

THE news of Jeanne Le Hardouey's death spread over Blanchelande with the natural rapidity of tragic events which befall us—spread as though blown by the winds, so electrical and instantaneous are the resounding rumors. Did Jeanne-Madelaine drown herself of her own free will? Was she the victim of despair, of an accident, or of a crime? These were questions, sinister and veiled, arising in every mind, problems passing with feverish curiosity through all conversations, which many years later revived with unspeakable terror at the wakes of spinners, or in the fields at the beginning of a furrow, when some circumstance brought back the mysterious story of Thomas Le Hardouey's wife.

When Mother Ingou and Mother Mahé took flight, terrified by the shepherd's monstrous deed, to find help in the village, so useless, alas! little Ingou, who shared the old women's terror, fled too, but in a different direction. Led by custom along the road she went every day, she ran to Clotte's cabin.

And what a night Clotte had had! When she had tried to restrain Jeanne she had indeed felt the bitter word that the unhappy one had thrown behind her as she tore herself away. "It is what I deserve," she thought. "How should I speak

of virtue?" And the memories of her past life fell heavily upon her heart. Paralyzed, chained to her threshold for many years, what could she do? How prevent or forewarn? She had nothing strong but her heart, and a heart alone, strong as it may be, is useless. Ah, what she felt was very grievous. Sinister presentiments rose in her soul. Sleeplessness often visited her hard cot with all the specters of her youth, but of all the long nights passed without sleep none had been like this desolate night. It was no longer a question of herself. It was a question of the only person whom she had respected and loved in the whole countryside. It was the single soul who had taken an interest in her fate and her solitude since the world's distrust and horror had extended its cruel solitude about her. Where had Jeanne-Madelaine gone? What had she done? The passion whose cries still rung in her ears—and Clotte knew the terrible power of passion!—was it going to destroy poor Jeanne? And these cries were answered soon by the moans of hawks, the frightened and harrowed doves of the tomb, which had begun to coo out their funeral loves from the yews which bordered the broken road of Broquebœuf. Like all solitary imaginations that live near to nature, Clotte was superstitious. In all great souls there is a little fold of feebleness where superstition dwells.

Restless, feverish, turning in vain from side to side, she got up and lit her oil lamp. In these long

wakeful nights we believe that we can burn up and consume the long hours, the devouring thoughts, the memories, in the lamp we light. But we burn nothing. Thoughts, memories, long hours, nothing disappears; everything remains. Clotte's oil lamp with its vacillating light was as somber to her eyes as to her ears the raucous far-away hawks' cries expiring sadly in the night. Light itself increased the visions by which she was obsessed. The picture of Judith killing Holofernes which hung, crudely lighted, between the curtains of her bed, seemed to come alive under her fascinated gaze. The thick vermilion of the peasant picture seemed like flowing blood, real blood. Clotte, who was not timid, shivered. This strong stoic was afraid. She blew out the oil lamp, but shadows do not drown our dreams. The vision remained in the depths of her eye, the depths of her heart, with a pitiless light. Seated on her bed, wrapped in her ugly camisole, a Nessus shirt of poverty and isolation which she was never more to take off, she rested her forehead on her knees, clasping her knotted hands around them, and remained thus, absorbed, bent over, until the break of day, when little Ingou turned the latch and opened the door brusquely as if she were chased.

"What a noise you are making," she said, "little one!" and then seeing the child's face she felt that the anxiety of the night was changed into frightful certitude. "Ah, there is a calamity in *Blanche-lande*," she said.

"There is," said little Ingou, in a voice broken by emotion and by running, "for Mistress Le Har-douey is dead; we found her at the bottom of the pool."

A cry that did not bespeak old age, but the cry of a lioness aroused, came from that broken heart, and was stopped on the lips of Clotte. Her breast, bent over upon her knees, fell back upon the bed and her head rolled in the covers, as if an invisible ax had cut it off at one blow.

"Jesus and Mary!" cried the child in terrified anguish, for, fleeing death, she seemed to find it again.

She went up to the bed whence every day she aided the paralytic to arise; she saw her, eyes fixed, white temples, the curved line of those set and haughty lips trembling, trembling as when the sob that we hold back overwhelms our hearts and must escape.

"Stop! Stop! Mother Clotte," cried the child. "Listen! There is the passing bell!"

And indeed the wind which blew from the direction of Blanchelande bore the sounds of the bell ringing out Jeanne-Madelaine's death with those sublime intervals growing more protracted as the lugubrious ringing goes on which seems to distil death in the air, to pour it drop by drop into our hearts with each stroke of the bell. At that moment, in a countryside usually so quiet, nothing prevented hearing the slow, poignant sounds broken by silence, that finished in a shrill and final tinkle,

like the last sigh of life on the edge of eternity. The morning grey before it was rosy began to lighten with the first gold rays of day, yet retained still something of the sonorous and vibrant calm of night. The sounds of the melancholy bell, becoming rarer, passed through the open door behind little Ingou and died on that cot where a lofty heart, which had resisted everything, broke into tears and realized at last what it had never understood, the burning, famished need of prayer.

Clotte got up at these sounds which told her that Jeanne would never get up again.

"I am not worthy to pray for her," she said, as if she were alone; "to weep for her, yes." And she put her hands over her eyes where the tears were rising, looked at her wet hands with dolorous pride, as if tears were a conquest for her! "Who would have said that I should weep again?—but pray for her I cannot; I have been too impious; God would laugh if he heard me pray! He knows too well what I am to listen to the sullied voice that never asked him anything for Clotilde Mauduit, but who would, if it dared, ask His mercy for Jeanne-Madeleine de Feuardent!"

And as if the prey of a sudden idea, "Listen, little one," she said, taking the child's hands in her own, "you are better than I. You are only a child; your soul is innocent. When I was your age they told me that God Himself when He came to earth loved children and listened to them. Kneel down there and pray for her!"

And with that sovereign gesture which she had retained through all the miseries of her life, she drew the child to her knees by the side of the bed.

"Yes, pray," she said in a voice broken by tears. "I will weep while you pray. But above all pray aloud," she continued, her sorrow increasing as she talked, "that I may hear you. Yes! that I may hear you even if I cannot join you. Ah, speak!" she said impetuously. "Speak to this God of little children, of the pure, of the patient, of the gentle, forsooth of everything that I am not!"

"But He is also the God of the wretched!" said the little girl, naïvely sublime, repeating simply what the priest had taught her.

"Ah, then He is mine!" said Clotte, feeling the thunder stroke which God sometimes sends through the weak lips of children. "Wait! wait! I will pray with you, my daughter——"

Leaning upon the shoulder of the kneeling child, she dragged herself out of bed. A paralytic whose soul was whole, she regained her power of movement and fell on her knees beside the little girl, and they prayed together.

At this moment Mother Ingou and Mother Mahé came back to the pool, accompanied by all the curious crowd of Blanchelande. Among these were Barbe Causseron and Nônon Cocouan. Nônon was sincerely distressed. They had found Jeanne's corpse still lying in the long grass, but the shepherd from whom the two old women had fled had disappeared. Only, before disappearing, the hor-

rible shepherd had accomplished one of those deeds which, when they are not a pious duty, are a sacrilege. He had cut off Jeanne's hair, that long chestnut hair, "which made," so Louis Tainnebouy said, "the most shining knot that had ever been coiled on a woman's neck," and to cut it he had been obliged to use the only instrument that he had at hand, that blade which he had dipped into the water of the pool. Jeanne-Madelaine's hair "had been sawed off like a sheaf with a poor scythe," added the grazier, "and in places rudely torn out." Was it a trophy of vengeance, this hair carried away by the vagrant shepherd to show to his nomad tribe like that of the redskins and savages, for at a certain level the kinship of the human race is shown by the identity of its customs. Or was it rather the inordinate desire of a sordid soul who seized this occasion to sell dear a beautiful head of hair to the wig-makers who travel through the country buying up the hair of poor young girls for bits of silver? Or rather, as Tainnebouy thought, was this hair of a woman who died under a charm to serve for some sorcery and to become a formidable talisman in the hands of this shepherd? It was Nônon Cocouan who first saw the theft from this noble head resting on the sod.

"Ah! the shepherd avenged himself to the last!" she said.

Indeed, the cut hair seemed to these peasants like a second murder. All of them talked of this sudden death and were grieved at the destiny of a woman

who had earned everyone's affection. The people from the Close had arrived at the first rumor of their mistress's death. Only Jeanne's husband, Maître Le Hardouey, was still absent. Disappearing the night before, as we know, immediately after entering the Close at a fierce gallop, when he heard that his wife was absent, he had not reappeared. His horse had come back alone, covered with sweat, the mane bristling, dragging the bridle that tripped her as she ran. Now, as Le Hardouey was not at all liked in Blanchelande, they began to ask in low voices and with hidden innuendo if Jeanne's death were not a crime and if the guilty one were not this husband who could not be found.

For a long time the rumors of the countryside about Le Hardouey had been disquieting. This man, of a naturally somber temperament, was more sour, more morose, more sulky than ever, so said the gossips, and though a profound jealousy might work silently in him, it might just as well break out in some terrible deed. Moreover, this idea was met by another in their minds. That former monk, that partisan chief, that haughty penitent, around whom had gathered so many feelings and ideas both powerful and vague, that Chouan whom they accused of having upset Jeanne's life and of having, they did not know how, destroyed her reason, also appeared capable of anything. If he had not actually pushed her with his bodily hand into the pool where she was drowned, he had precipitated the deed by the hand of the spirit, by breaking her heart in

shame and despair. It was hard to know which one of these two opinions to accept; and both added to expressions of regret at Jeanne's death something suspiciously sinister and menacing which, excited as he was obliged to be, would prepare an observer for the terrible scene which was to take place the next day.

Nevertheless, Jeanne's body had to remain exposed on the field until, according to the law, the doctor and the justice of peace of Blanchelande should come for what is strikingly called the *raising of the corpse*. These men and women, who had run out to sate their curiosity by an unexpected and tragic sight, called back to the fields by the day's work, retired little by little, talking together of an event for which they were to seek the cause for a long time. When the crowd of the curious had vanished, there remained by the corpse only the chief steward of the Close, charged with watching the dead body until the arrival of the doctor and the justice of the peace, and Nônon Cocouan, who with a spontaneous impulse had proposed herself for this pious service. This story has said often enough that Nônon had always been devoted to Jeanne. In recent times she had valiantly defended her against those who accused her of having forgotten the proprieties of her life in the "purlieus of perdition," and by that they meant in Blanchelande the visits to Clotte and her obscure connection with the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan. Nônon, more than anyone else except Clotte, perhaps, was moved

by this sudden death, and the more so because stricken hearts understand one another. Even while she defended Jeanne, and though she had never shared her confidence, Nônon recognized love that was suffering because formerly in her youth she also had felt it. The poor girl was possessed by a veritable fanaticism of silent pity for Jeanne-Madelaine. Her deep respect had prevented her from giving that mute and expressive evidence of it which touches the heart without wounding it. Now to-day when she could do it she did it with an ardor bathed in tears. Pious as she was, she believed that Jeanne-Madelaine saw her from above, beside her earthly remains. To be seen by those whom one has loved in silence and whom one has never told in life how much they were beloved, ah! this is one of the solaces which make up for the impossibilities of existence, which religion gives as a prize to those who have faith. Nônon Cocouan felt the aroma of the goodness of God mixing with the tears that she shed for Jeanne and sweetening them. Morning moved on with splendor. It was one of the most beautiful summer days that had been seen for a long time; the air was clear, the pond diaphanous; the grass smelled sweet; heat rose in the plants; the insects, attracted by Jeanne's immobility, buzzed around this body dropped there with the grace of a cut flower; and Nônon, seated on one side, or at moments kneeling, held her rosary in her joined hands and prayed to Her who still takes pity when God remembers only justice; for the gift

that God gave His Mother is to be pitiful longer than He. From time to time this village mystic raised her eyes, still beautiful and of a blue that the heart's fire, lighting them now, made more penitent and more chaste, toward the other eternal blue which nothing, neither centuries nor storms, tarnishes—toward the sky of shining azure from which she saw Jeanne leaning toward her, smiling affectionately. Seated also on the ground at a little distance, the chief steward at the Close sat in an overwhelmed stupor caused in common natures by the neighborhood of death. Nônon had covered Jeanne's face from the increasing heat of the sun with the red cotton apron which Clotte had torn in trying to hold her. Only a common purple rag destiny had left to cover the face of this noble girl who had hidden under coarse clothing a patrician soul, long restrained, long overwhelmed, but suddenly breaking free at the approach of a soul of her own race, thus killing her happiness and ruining her life.

It was toward evening that the "raising of the body" took place. After the accomplishment of this legal act, the justice of the peace ordered the servant who accompanied him and the chief steward of the Close to carry Jeanne into the house nearest the meadow. Mistress Le Hardouey's funeral was fixed for the next day at the parish church of Blanchelande. Uncertain as they were over the manner of Jeanne's death, the good Curé Caillemer's charity was not troubled by having to apply that

severe but profound canon law which refuses Christian burial to all who die as suicides without repentance. He greatly respected Jeanne-Madelaine, whom he called the nurse of his poor, and his heart would have been torn had he not been able to bless her dust. God saved the curé's kindness from this rude test and Jeanne, responsible to God alone for the mystery of her death, could be buried in holy earth.

They carried her there in the midst of an immense concourse of people who came from the neighboring parishes of Lithaire and Neufmesnil. The bells of Blanchelande, which, according to the Norman custom, had rung all that day and the day before, had told the whole countryside that some rich person was dead. Gossip passing from mouth to mouth had soon told them that it was Mistress Le Hardouey. In Normandy, in my own youth, of all the ceremonies which drew the population to the churches, the most solemn, the most moving to the public imagination, were the funerals. The indifferent gathered as well as the interested, the impious as well as the devout. It was not as in Scotland, where the funeral repasts could collect a concourse without devotion and without purity. In Normandy there was no repast after the burial except for the priests. The crowd returned, as it came, with an empty stomach, but it had come to see what is always one of the most moving and edifying of spectacles, and returned with its head full of good thoughts even when its heart was un-

touched. That day the funeral of Mistress Le Hardouey did not attract only because it was a religious ceremony, or because the deceased had been known for ten leagues as the queen of house-keepers, but also because her sudden death was not natural and because the shadow of a crime hung over it. So they came to Jeanne's funeral more to talk about her extraordinary and unexplained death than to pay their last tribute to her. The chattering, that eternal movement of the human tongue, does not stop either at the closed tomb or following the bier, and nothing, neither religion nor death, freezes over the implacable curiosity that Eve handed down to her descendants. Perhaps for the first time devotion was lacking in these peasants. What disturbed them above all else and seemed strange and terrible to them, who retained at the bottom of their hearts the feeling for family as Christianity has established it, was to see no relatives follow the bier. The family of Jeanne de Feuarden, whose pride of nobility had been wounded by her marriage with Thomas Le Hardouey, had not come to the funeral, and, on the other hand, the relatives of Le Hardouey, envious of the fortune he had amassed and also hurt by his marriage which had kept them at a distance, did not appear in the cortége despite the invitations carefully sent to them. There was quite a space between the bier borne, according to the usage of the country, by the servants of the Close, two by two, holding the ends of embroidered linen, and the poor of the

parish, who for six silver coins and a big loaf of bread were present at the ceremony carrying pine torches in their hands. Within the memory of man at Blanchelande there had never been a funeral where this space reserved for the mourners had remained empty. It was remarked upon aloud. Maître Le Hardouey had not returned to the Close. All eyes were fixed upon the place which he should have occupied. Alas! there was another man whom the eyes of the congregation searched for in vain—the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan. Having left for Montsurvent the day before, as Mother Mahé had told Le Hardouey, he had not yet returned from the Countess Jacqueline's. During the whole funeral ceremony his oak stall remained closed in the choir and the formidable cowl that they saw there every Sunday did not appear.

Was it the crowd's preoccupation, divided between the two absentees, which prevented their taking notice of one person whose presence, had it been remarked, would have seemed as extraordinary as the simultaneous absence of the other two? Indeed, whether it was owing to impiety or to physical suffering, Clotte never went to church. It was fifteen years since they had seen her there. It is only fair to say that they had seen her nowhere else. She never went beyond her own threshold. Too strong a spirit to insult holy things, Clotte seemed to disdain them, never in her life invoking them. The Salome of Haut-Mesnil who with men had had all the ferocity, powerful as a flail, of a beauty, had

become an ascetic of solitude and the Mary of Egypt of wounded pride, but she had never suspected the strength she would have found at the foot of the cross. When Curé Caillemer, on his Easter rounds, came in and seated himself by her to speak of the consolation she could draw from the accomplishment of her Christian duties, she smiled with bitter pride. She was an egoistical and sterile Rachel, inconsolable because her youth and beauty had passed. She smiled also at the humble priest, a child of the parish, whom she had seen grow up behind the plow of the neighboring furrow and who bore upon his forehead none of the marks of nobility that would have consecrated him in the eyes of such a woman more than the holy oil of the priesthood. This haughtiness, this smile, this desperate pride, this unchanging attitude—for he found her the same each year—this manner of emptying the chalice of absinthe and of holding it as she had held the cup of debauch at the castle of Haut-Mesnil, all this overwhelmed the pastor and restrained upon his timid lips the words that might convert her. He said so himself. This woman, laden with iniquity, in her dilapidated shanty, in garments of rigid poverty, gave him more trouble than the Countess de Montsurvent in her castle, under the feudal dais that she had had the courage to reëstablish in the carved oaken hall of her ancestors, as if the storm of the Revolution had not carried away all rights and all the signs of such rights. For all these reasons the good curé had often

asked himself what would become of old Clotte and if, after a whole life of scandal and haughty incredulity, it was not high time for her to set an example of repentance.

Who knows? Perhaps the hour had not come. Jeanne's death, the last drop of bitterness, had already caused this heart to overflow, though for years it had carried its misery without a tremor and with unbowed head. What she would never do for herself, this woman, who had never asked quarter of God, she had done for Jeanne. She had prayed. She had found the humility of prayer and of tears. Under the blow of Jeanne's death she had sworn to herself that, despite her paralysis, she would go to the Blanchelande church and accompany the one she called her child to the tomb, and if she could not walk she would drag herself prone. Well, what she swore she did. The day of the funeral she rose at dawn and dressed herself in the blackest of her clothes and, her two hands on her stick, without which she could not take a single step, she commenced the painful passage which was a journey to her. It was about one league from her hut to the Blanchelande cloister, but one league was a long distance to her. She did not walk; rather she dragged the dead part of her body, pulling it along by a continuous effort of her powerful torso and enthusiastic will. The poets have often spoken of the union of death and life. She was the picture of this union, but life was so intense in her upper body, leaning upon the nervous hands,

held up in turn by the knotted stick, that one could almost believe, at moments, that life animated her throughout. She went slowly, but she went. Her forehead was purple with fatigue. Her austere face took on the tint of fire, like a bronze vase devoured by an interior flame whose opaque sides, become transparent, lighted up with color.

Sometimes, betrayed by her strength, conquered but not desperate, she stopped breathless, on a mound or a pile of stones in the road, then rose up again, following the road, only to sit down again after a few steps. The hours passed. The bells of Blanchelande sounded for the funeral mass; the unhappy woman heard them almost with fright. With a look she measured the distance which separated her from the church, with her thought what remained to be covered by her accursed slow feet. "Oh, I shall get there!" she had said to herself hopefully. Then she said, "Shall I be there in time?" No rider, no farmer with his wagon, who perhaps would have been touched by the failing energy of this sublime and fainting cripple still dragging on, who might have taken her up, passed on this solitary road. Her breast swelled with anxiety and mad anger, her heart stamped upon her dead feet. Soon she could no longer stop even to take breath and, as she was broken in body and sank down under her weight, wishing not to be held back by the fall, with heroic will she began to drag herself by her hands over the stones, holding her stick between her teeth, since she dared not lose it, and biting it

with convulsive exasperation. God doubtless took pity on so much courage and allowed her to arrive at the Blanchelande church before mass was said.

When, half dead, she reached the gate of the cemetery, the priest who was celebrating was intoning the Preface. The church was too full for her to enter. She stopped on the steps of one of the transept doors which opened into the Lady chapel and there, crouched on the heels of her sabots, behind some women who were standing to look into the chapel, she mixed her prayers and inner desolation with the magnificent psalmody which the church sings over its dead and with the cawing of the crows swirling in black flights just then around the sounding belfry. As she was acting in the name of duty and, moreover, was still the proud Clotte, she did not speak to these women who with backs turned whispered to one another, talking of the dead, of Maître Thomas Le Hardouey and the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan. And that was why, when she rose from where she crouched, before mass was finished, she escaped the glance of these women who had not noticed her.

Nevertheless, mass being said, the bearers took up the bier from the trestles upon which it had been set, the priest began to march down the nave singing the last psalms and to go out by the portal, followed by the crowd, into the cemetery, where the open grave awaited the coffin. Pathetic and formidable moment! the strongest heart cannot resist it, when ranged in a circle, the candles extinguished,

at the edge of the open tomb, the priests, with a final *requiescat*, sprinkled the holy water on the bier divested of its black drapery, where the earth thrown in by the spades falls with a dull and lamentable thud. They had reached this terrible moment and until then nothing had troubled the imposing and overwhelming ceremony. Only when the priest, having blessed the coffin, had retired after an *amen*, followed by a mournful and vast silence, leaving the crowd grouped around the grave which they were filling up and sprinkling in turn with holy water, as he had done before them, a woman kneeling on the piled-up dirt of the ditch, whom no one had noticed, rose with difficulty, placed herself behind the man who was sprinkling the grave, and advanced to take the sprinkler which he held; but as he went to give it to her the man looked at the hand held out toward him and at the creature to whom this hand belonged.

"Oh!" he said, trembling, "Clotte!"

And as if this hand held out were pestilent, he drew back with horror.

"What are you doing here, old shorn hag," he continued, "and for what new calamity have you left your hole?"

Clotte's name, her unexpected presence, the man's accent and gesture, sent an attentive vibration through the crowd such as precedes great scenes and great calamities as a warning of what is to follow.

Clotte had turned pale at the name of shorn hag,

which recalled a brutal outrage that she had never been able to forget. But as if she had not heard, or as if the pain of Jeanne's death had bereft her of all anger:

"Give it, that I may bless her," she said slowly, "and do not insult age in the presence of death," she added with gentle firmness and imposing melancholy.

But the man to whom she spoke was of a rude and coarse nature and the habits of his trade increased his natural ferocity. He was a Blanchelande butcher brought up to execrate Clotte. His name was Auge. His father, a butcher before him, was one of the four who had tied Clotte to the post in the market place and cut with ignoble shears in 1793 the hair of which she had been so proud. This man had died a violent death shortly after the insult and his death had been vaguely imputed to Clotte by his violent and superstitious relatives, so that partisan hatred joined to the other hatred made the son implacable.

"No!" he said. "You will desecrate the holy water, old witch! You never put your foot inside a church, and here you are, you impudent creature! Have you come here to bewitch her body, you, who can no longer drag your bones! Have you come to the funeral of the woman you bewitched, who died only because she was weak enough to visit you!"

The thought he uttered seized of a sudden the crowd who had known Jeanne so unhappy and had never been able to explain her strayed wits, the

violence of her coloring, nor her death as mysterious as the last days of her life. A long and confused murmur circulated among the heads huddled in the cemetery, lighted by a pale ray of the sun. Among these instinctive mutterings the words *witch* and *bewitched* were heard like confused cries which threaten to become piercing soon—tow which commences to catch and set everything on fire.

The priests were no longer there; they had gone back into the church. There was no longer a single man there who, by the authority of his word and his character, could oppose this crowd, stop and dominate it. Did Clotte see the peril which surrounded her in the close crowd of this vast circle of irritated and ignorant men, who for years had had no intercourse with her, she having looked down from the height of her isolation upon them as one looks down from the height of a tower?

But if she saw it, her former courage, old blood of the concubine of the lords of the land, mounted to her furrowed cheek like a last light, in presence of these men who to her were mere clowns beginning to dance. Leaning on her thorn stick, three steps from the open grave, she turned to Auge the butcher with one of those looks she used in her youth when, seated on the croup of Sang-d'Aiglon de Haut-Mesnil's horse, she passed through the scandalized and silent village of Blanchelande.

"Silence, son of an executioner!" she said. "It brought no good luck to your father to touch the head of Clotilde Mauduit!"

"But I will finish my father's work," said the butcher, beside himself at Clotte's words. "He only shaved you, old she-wolf, but I will take you by your wig and skin you like a sheep."

Fitting the gesture to the menace, he raised his thick hand, accustomed to grasp the ox by the horns and hold it under the knife. The menaced head remained upright. A blow saved her from injury. A stone thrown from the midst of the crowd, outraged by Clotte's inflexible disdain, struck her forehead, whence the blood spurted and flung her backward.

But thrown down, her eyes full of blood from the open wound, she raised herself on her arms as high as she could.

"You cowards!" she cried as a second stone whistling from another side of the crowd struck her anew in the chest and left a large spot of blood on the black kerchief which covered her breast.

The blood had, as usual, its cruel fascination. In the place of calming the crowd it intoxicated it, adding thirst to drunkenness. Cries of "*Death to the old witch!*" rose and soon drowned the other cries of those who said: "*Stop! No! do not kill her!*" But madness fell and spread around, contagious among these huddled heads and close-pressed breasts. The crowd moved and undulated, so compact as to be stifling. Flight was impossible except to those on the outer edge of this mass of men; and the curious who could not see what was happening at the edge of the grave looked over the

shoulders of the others, increasing the crush. The curé and the priests, who heard the cries of the excited mob, came out from the church and tried to penetrate to the grave, the theater of a drama becoming bloody. But they could not.

"Go back, Father," cried voices; "you have nothing to do here! It is the old witch, Clotte, that blasphemer, upon whom we wreak justice! Tomorrow we will give you back your cemetery, purified."

And saying this, each one threw his stone at Clotte, at the risk of wounding those who stood near her. The second stone, which had pierced her breast, had rolled her in the dust at the feet of Auge, but she had not fainted. Impatient to join in the torture, but too near to stone her, the butcher kicked the prone body with his foot.

Then, like the severed head of Charlotte Corday which opened its eyes when the blow of the executioner sullied her virgin cheek, Clotte opened her eyes full of blood at Auge's outrage and in a trembling voice she said:

"Auge, I am dying; but I will forgive you if you will drag me to the grave of Mademoiselle de Feuardent and throw me in there with her, that the vassal may sleep with the masters she has loved so well!"

"There are no masters now, nor any Mademoiselle de Feuardent," replied Auge, become a Blue suddenly, burning with the passions of his father. "No! You shall not be buried with the one whom

you led astray by your sorcery, accursed daughter of the devil!"

He struck her with his iron shoe just above the heart. Then in a loud voice, "There she is crushed in her own venom, the viper!" he said. "Come, boys, who has a hurdle to drag the carcass on?"

The question passed from mouth to mouth, and suddenly, with that electricity which is rapid and more incomprehensible than lightning, a hundred arms brought the answer, passing from one to the other the barred gate of the cemetery torn from its hinges, on which they threw the inanimate body of Clotte. The breathless men harnessed themselves to the gate and began to drag, like wild horses or tigers, the car of vengeance and ignominy, and they galloped over the tombs and stones with their burden. Wild with ferocity, with hatred, with rebel fear—for man reacts against his soul's fear by becoming mad with audacity!—they passed like the wind roaring, like a waterspout, before the portal of the church, where the priests stood livid and rigid with horror; overthrowing everything as they went, a prey to the *delirium tremens* of crowds, become animals again and unfeeling as flails, they crossed the amazed village howling and took the road toward the moor. Where were they going? They did not know. They went as the storm goes. They went as the lava flows.

Only, a less rare thing than one would believe if one knew the convulsive changes of mobs, by degrees as they advanced toward the terrible execu-

tion they became fewer, less ardent, less furious. This crowd, this legion, this enormous multiple animal with many heads and many arms, lost some of its fleece or outer rank of men in the thickets along the road. The ranks were clearing up. You could see here and there one or another detach himself and flee in silence. You could see some stopping at the turn of a road and not rejoining the mad and clamorous troop, seized with a shiver of remorse, a horror which came slowly but felt icy at last. There was only a handful of men, the dregs of the frothing flood of a moment ago. The consciousness of crime came back to them, to that depth and lower depth of humanity which turns stubborn at crime when attacks of violence are over. Moving onward but less quickly, this consciousness grew so strong in them that it finally stopped them short with its strong, cold steely arm. Fear of the crime which they had just committed, which little by little had decimated their numbers, seized the last who were dragging on this iron hurdle the woman they had killed, assassinated. Fear was added to fear. They entered the moor, the moor, the place of mystery, possessed by spirits, the moor incessantly haunted by vagrant shepherds and warlocks. They no longer dared look at the body soiled with blood and mud which bumped at their heels. They left it and fled, dispersing as clouds which have emptied the storm over a country disperse without anyone knowing where they have gone.

Silence spread over the country become all of a sudden solitary. It was the profounder silence because it followed clamor. The belfry of Blanchelande, whose noisy ringing had stopped after twenty-four hours of continuous strokes, was only a mute spire where shadow mounted by degrees as the sun leaned to the horizon. There was not a sound in the village. The frightful spectacle which had furrowed it like a vision of blood and wrath, had left a weight of consternation on the houses where the terror of the morning seemed still to guard the doors. The afternoon dragged along in mournful sadness; and when the evening of this day of sinister memory commenced to fall upon the earth, you could hear in the far-away blue neither the joyously melancholy chant of cowherds, nor the cries of children at the thresholds of the doors, nor the lively flicking of the millers' whips returning to the mill seated on their sacks, their feet hanging over the flanks of the pacing mares. One would have said that Blanchelande was dead to the end of its highway. To anyone used to this country, ordinarily so animated and alive at these hours, there was something extraordinary which could not be seen but was felt. The Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, returning that evening from the Countess Jacqueline's, perhaps felt what I am trying to make you understand. He had crossed the moor of Lessay on his filly, black as his clothes, and ever since he had started across toward the part of the moor where solitude finished, he had not met a living

soul. All of a sudden his fiery steed, its head high in the air, gave a start and reared back, neighing. That drew him from his revery, for this man, overthrown in the débris of a ruined cause, this type of a vanquished Marius, found his marsh of Minturno in the abyss of his own thought. He looked at the obstacle which made the mane stand up on the neck of his black filly and saw in front of the lifted feet of the animal Clotte bleeding, inanimate, stretched in the road on the iron hurdle.

"That is the work of the Blues!" he said, putting his finger on half the truth by dint of his eternal preoccupation. "The bandits have killed the old Chouanne."

He took his foot from the stirrup, approached the body of Clotte, took off his chamois glove, and turned up the bleeding face toward him. A moment passed as he felt her pulse. By a prodigy of vital force such as is found sometimes in exceptional constitutions, Clotte, who had swooned, moved. She was not yet dead, but she was dying.

"Clotilde Mauduit!" said the priest in his sonorous voice.

"Who calls me!" she murmured in a feeble voice. "Who? I cannot see any more."

"It is Jehoel de la Croix-Jugan, Clotilde," replied the abbé, as he raised her and laid her head upon a mound. "Yes, 'tis I. You must recognize me, Clotilde. I have come to save you."

"No," she said feebly, and smiled with a dis-

dain which had no more bitterness, "you have come to see me die. They have killed me."

"Who killed you? Who?" said the priest impetuously. "It was the Blues, was it not, my daughter?" he insisted with an ardor burning with hatred.

"The Blues!" she said, bewildered. "The Blues! Auge is a Blue; the son of his father. But they all did it—they all fell upon me—Blanchelande—all of them."

Her voice became unintelligible. No further names were uttered. Only her chin still moved. She raised her hand to her breast and made that dreadful gesture of the dying when they seem with convulsive fingers to push away the spiders from their coffin. Whoever has seen death knows this terrible gesture.

The abbé recognized it. He saw that death was near. He still tried to question the dying woman, but she did not hear. She was absorbed in the last agony. He, who did not know the reason for this terrible death there before his eyes, thought of the Blues, his obsession, and he said to himself that any partisan crime might relight the extinguished war. The mutilated body of old Clotte seemed to him as good as anything else to put on the end of a pike and make a flag to reawaken the Norman peasants to battle.

"What is happening?" he exploded, already trembling, palpitating and stamping the earth with his riding boots and silver spurs. The chief, the inflexible partisan, stood up, become indomitable again

in the priest, and forgetting that he was a minister of the God of mercy, and that he had before him one dying but not yet dead, he jumped upon his horse as if he heard the battle charge. When he fell back into his saddle his hand feverishly caressed the butts of his pistols in their holsters. The sun setting in front of him shone full in his face, encircled by his black velvet chin-strap and marked with infernal wounds where the fire of thought kindled that scarlet which a celebrated blind man compared to the sound of a trumpet. He dug his spurs into the flanks of his filly, who bounded forward, almost breaking the girth. By a movement prompter than thought he drew one of the pistols from its holster and raised it in the air, his finger on the trigger, as if the enemy were four feet away, hallucinated by dint of his belligerent hopes. His pistols were his old companions. During the war they had never left his belt. When Mother Hecquet had saved him she had hidden them in her cabin. These were the Chouan's pistols. On their striped barrels there was the cross ancrée of a fleur-de-lis which said that the Chouan had fought for his Saviour, his God, and his lord, the King of France.

The setting sun made the cross shine in his eyes and recalled him to the austere duty of his whole life in which he had too often failed.

"Ah," he said pushing back the pistol in the holster of the saddle, "you will always be the same sinner, insensate Jehoel! Thirst for the enemy's blood will always dry up your impious mouth. Do

you always forget that you are a priest? This woman is about to die and you are thinking of killing instead of speaking to her of God and of absolution. Get down from your horse, murderer, and pray!"

He jumped from his filly as before.

"Clotilde Mauduit, are you dead?" he said as he approached her.

It may have been the supreme convulsion, but she twisted in the dust like a branch of dry wood in the fire. It seemed that the voice of the priest galvanized her last hour.

"If you hear me," he said, "oh, my daughter, think of the terrible God to whom you are going and make in thought an act of contrition, oh, sinner! And though I myself am unworthy and a penitent, yet a priest of God who looses and unlooses, I absolve and bless you."

With hands extended he slowly pronounced the sacramental words of absolution over this forehead already darkened by the shadows of death. A singular priest who recalled those bishops of Poland who said mass booted and spurred like soldiers, with their pistols on the altar. Never had a prouder being stood up and recited pitiful words over a prouder being cast down. When it was finished, "She has passed," he said, and he took off his cloak and spread it over the corpse. Then he took two broken branches in a ravine and laid them in the form of a cross over the cloak. The sun had set in a bank of somber mist. "Adieu, Clotilde Mau-

duit," he said, "accomplice of my mad youth, there you are shrouded by my hands! If a great heart can save, you will be saved. But pride has led your life astray like mine. Sleep in peace to-night under the mantle of the monk of Blanchelande and we will come for you to-morrow." He mounted his horse, looked back once again on the black form which lay on the earth. His horse, knowing his imperious knee, trembled at being held back, and wanted to start forward, but he restrained it. His hand falling upon the pommel of the saddle touched by chance the butt of his pistols. "Hush," he said, "temptations to war!" And walking the filly whom he ordinarily sent forward at a gallop which they called mad, he went away reciting in a low voice through the shadows the prayers for the dead.

Chapter Fourteen

IT WAS black night when the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan crossed Blanchelande and reëntered his house at the end of the village. He had met no one. In Normandy, as they say, the peasants go to bed with the chickens, and, moreover, the frightful scene of the morning had emptied the Blanchelande streets, for men hide themselves in their houses as beasts in their dens when they are afraid. Recalled by Clotte's death to a feeling of his duties as priest, the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan waited until the next day, despite the natural impatience of his character, to find out about the event in which his hot-headedness made him foresee the possibility of once again taking up arms. He learned through Mother Mahé the details of the horrible catastrophe which had plunged Blanchelande into stupefaction and fright.

One of those catastrophes was of such character that the authorities, then being reëstablished in France at the end of the Revolution, had to act and punish. The murderers of Clotte were sought. Auge, who was judged according to the laws of the times, passed several months in the Coutances prison. As to his accomplices, they were too numerous to be apprehended. The law was frightened, and in striking over too wide a surface it feared to rekindle war in a country of which it was

none too sure. As to the death of Jeanne Le Hardouey, the verdict was suicide. No charge, indeed, in the precise sense of the law, was brought against anyone. The only thing in the profound mystery of Jeanne's death which resembled suspicion was the disappearance of Thomas Le Hardouey. If he were entirely innocent of his wife's murder, why had he so suddenly left the country where he had so much property and the beautiful place of the Close, the admiration and envy of all the farmers of Cotentin?

Was he dead? If he were, why had his family heard nothing of his decease? If he lived, and if, whether guilty or not, he had reason to be disturbed by the murder of his wife, why did he not reappear, since days and nights accumulating, with forgetfulness in their train and the distractions which make up life, prevent men from thinking long of the same thing? People spoke of having seen him in the islands, the islands of Alderney and of Guernsey, but they had not dared to speak to him. Was it true? Or was it a mistake, or boastfulness? For there are always people who have always seen what is being talked about, though they may not have taken four steps. In any case Maître Le Hardouey remained absent. They held his property in trust, but so long a time passed that they finally despaired of his return.

But what the ordinary course of life did not diminish or carry away with the rest was the impression of mysterious terror, redoubled by the

events of this story, which the great Abbé de la Croix-Jugan inspired in all the country round. If, like Thomas Le Hardouey, the abbé had also left the country, they might perhaps have lost that idea which, in the general feeling of the country people, made him the cause of Jeanne-Madelaine's misfortune. But he stayed right under the eyes that he had so long attracted and seemed to brave their distrust. The circumstances of his remaining at Blanchelande, the unbroken solitude in which he continued to live, and, if I may say so, the blackness of his face where new shadows thickened more and more, these were what fixed and immortalized in Blanchelande and Lessay belief in the occult and evil power that the abbé had exercised over Jeanne, a belief that Maître Louis Tainnebouy had found established in all minds. Had the death of Jeanne touched the soul of the priest?

"When you told him that she had perished," said Nônon to Mother Mahé, one morning when she was drawing water from the Colibeaux well, "what did you notice in him, Mother Mahé?"

"Nothing unusual," replied Mother Mahé. "He was in his big armchair by the fire and I was crouching on my heels, blowing at it. I heard his voice talking over my head, but I did not dare to turn round to look, for, though a dog may look at a bishop, he is not a very easy man to look at. He asked me what had happened to Clotte, and when I told him that she had had the courage to go to Mistress Le Hardouey's funeral and that it

was at the blessing of the grave that they had begun to stone her, oh! then—did he really know of the death of Mistress Le Hardouey or did he not know? But I, awaiting some pitiful word from him who had known, and known too well Mistress Le Hardouey, I was struck by the silence in the room, for he did not reply by a single scrap of a word. The wood, which had caught, began to crackle, crackle, and I was still blowing on it. The flames roared, and I heard only that; he moved no more than a post. He was so still that I ventured to turn around, but I did not linger, my poor Nônon, once I had seen those two eyes like a wild cat's. I saw very little in the room but his eyes; his body never moved, and I left him looking fixedly into the fire, and his look would have served better than my poor breath to light it."

"Was that all?" said Nônon, sad and disappointed.

"That is all, truly," replied Mahé, letting the chain slip which carried the bucket to the depths of the fresh clear well and sounded all along its verdant sides.

"He is not a human being like other people!" said Nônon dreamily, her beautiful arm outlined by the narrow sleeve of her bodice resting against her earthen jar, set on the margin of the well.

And slowly she carried away the filled jar, thinking that, of all those who had loved Jeanne-Madelaine de Feuardent, she was the only one who had loved her and done her no harm.

And perhaps she was right. Indeed, Clotte had loved Jeanne-Madelaine profoundly, but her affection had had its own dangers for the unhappy woman. She had raised thoughts and useless regrets by the passionate respect she had for the old name of Feuardent. There is no doubt to those who understand the tyranny of our soul's habits that this exaltation, revived by conversations with Clotte, had predisposed Jeanne-Madelaine to the sad love which finished her life. As to the abbé himself, a soul closed like a fortress without loopholes, who allowed no one to see his thoughts or his feelings, is it too bold to think that he had that sentiment for Jeanne de Feuardent which dominating souls feel for the devoted souls that serve them? It is true that at the period of Jeanne's death the devotion of this noble woman had become useless because of the peace that all the efforts and vast intrigues of the former monk could not hinder, but, however it may be, the life of the abbé showed no external modification and people could draw no new inference from habits which did not change. The Abbé de la Croix-Jugan remained as they had always known him, neither more nor less. Cloistered in his bluish granite house, where he received no one, he never went out except to go to Montsurvent, whose turrets, so the Blues of the country about said, inclosed more than one nest of Royalist owls; but he never passed the entire week there, for one of the rules of the penitence imposed upon him was to assist at all the offices on Sunday at the parish

church at Blanchelande and not elsewhere. How often, when they believed he was detained at Mont-survent by one of those unknown circumstances that they always took for plots, they saw him reappearing in the choir, in his ordinary place, wrapped in his proud hood; and the spurs which lifted the hem of his alb and his cloak told them easily enough that he had just jumped from the saddle. The peasants pointed out to each other these spurs, which vibrated with his strong firm step, so little suited were they to the heels of a priest. Except for these absences of a few days, the Abbé Jehoel, unoccupied and somber, whom the imagination of the people did not in the least understand, killed time in his empty days by walking from one end of the room to the other for hours together, his arms crossed, his head down. They saw him through the windowpanes; and more than once he tired out the patience of those who, in the distance, watched this black, eternal walker.

Often, too, at the end of the day, he would mount his horse and penetrate intrepidly into the moor of Lessay, which made everyone for ten miles round tremble. As such a man could only arouse astonishment and questioning, people wondered what he could be looking for, at such hours, in that desert whence he never returned until late at night, so late that they never saw him coming back. Only, the next morning in the village from door to door they would ask, "Did you hear the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan's filly last night?" The wiseacres of the

countryside, who realized that the former monk of Blanchelande would never succeed in sloughing his old skin of a party leader, tried various times to follow him and spied from a distance on these twilight and nocturnal promenades in order to assure themselves that in this immense and desert steppe there were not, as there had been formerly, councils of war in the moonlight or in the darkness. But the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan's black filly went as if she had lightning in her veins and was soon lost in space. And in this respect, as in all others, the former monk of Blanchelande remained the formidable enigma to which Maître Louis Tainnebouy, many years after his death, as mysterious as his life, had not found the key.

Now, one of those nights Maître Tainnebouy told me upon the say-so of the shepherds whom he had met just before the opening of this story—one of those nights when the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan was wandering through the moor according to custom, a number of the tribe of shepherds without fire or abode, who were taken for Sabbath-haunters, were seated in a circle on some square stones, which they had kicked up with their sabots to the foot of a little mound that they called "*the Warlock's Hill*." When they had no herds to lead and, in consequence, no folds to share with the sheep when they brought them back in the evening, the shepherds slept in the open moor. If it were cold or wet, they made a sort of low rough tent with their coats and the canvas of their wallets, stretched

on their iron-tipped sticks stuck into the earth. This evening they had lighted a fire with cakes of dried pulp picked up from the doors of the cider presses and turf stolen from the farms, and they were warming themselves at this flameless fire which gives only a red and smoky but persistent ember. The moon, in its first quarter, had set early.

"The last light is gone!" said one of them. "The abbé must be on the moor. It is he who has frightened it away."

"Truly!" said another, gluing his ear to the earth. "I hear the steps of his horse coming from the south, but he is far away!"

He listened again.

"Stop!" he said. "There is another step nearer, the step of a man; a bold fellow to range this moor at such an hour before us and the mad Abbé de la Croix-Jugan!"

And as he ceased to speak, the two dogs sleeping beside the embers, their muzzles stretched out on their paws, began to growl.

"Be quiet, Black-Nose!" said the shepherd who had spoken first and who was no other than the shepherd of the old rectory. "There are no sheep to steal, good dogs. Sleep."

It was as black as the muzzle of the dog whom he had just called Black-Nose, which had that characteristic sign of the ferocity of his race. The shepherd saw a vague shadow outlined quite near them in the chiaroscuro of the brown sky. Only as the purity of the air at night doubles the value

of sound and renders the slightest shadows more distinct: "Is he still in the world, the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan?" said a voice behind the shepherds. "And you shepherds of the devil, who know all, can you tell one who will pay you well for the good news, if he is likely to leave it soon?"

"Oh, so you are back again, Maître Le Hardouey," said the shepherd, without even turning his head toward the voice, his hands stretched over the embers. "Here it is thirteen months since the Close has lain idle without you. How late you are, Maître! And the bones of your wife must have grown soft while she waited."

Was it really Le Hardouey standing there in the shadow? They might have doubted it, for he was a violent man, and yet he did not answer.

"Ah, so we have softened now!" went on the shepherd, continuing his abominable irony, and taking up the heart of this silent man as Ugolino did the skull of his enemy, to plunge his insatiable tooth in deeper.

If it were Le Hardouey, this man armed in body and soul, said Tainnebouy, to return an injury and pay cash on the spot to the person who offered it, he had greatly changed, since he did not boil with wrath listening to the provoking and derisory words of the miserable shepherd.

"Shut up, damn you!" he ended by saying in a broken tone, with bitter melancholy. "The dead are dead, and the living—you think they live—but the worms are eating them though they still talk

and walk. I did not come here to talk to you of her, who is dead."

"What did you come for, then?" said the shepherd, incisive and calm as power itself, while he still sat on the stone, his hands stretched over the brazier.

"I came," replied Thomas Le Hardouey in a voice that resolution forced into harsh trembling, "to sell my soul to Satan, your master, Shepherd! For a long time I thought there was no soul, and no Satan, either. But what the priest did not know how to do, you did! I believe in the devil, and I believe in your sorcery, creatures of hell! People are wrong to distrust you and to look upon you as vermin, to shrug their shoulders when they call you sorcerers. You forced me to believe in the rumors that tell what you are. You have power. I have felt it. Ah well! I have come to deliver up my life and my soul for all eternity to the accursed one, your master, if you will but throw one of your spells over that accursed Abbé de la Croix-Jugan!"

The three shepherds began to grin with scorn, watching him with eyes that shone in the uncertain reflections from the coals.

"If that is all you have to say to us, Maître Le Hardouey," replied the shepherd of the old rectory, "you can go back to the country you came from and never put foot again in the moor, for spells are powerless over the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan."

"Then you have not the power?" said Le Har-

douey. "You are nothing more than stable boys, than dirty scavengers of pig dung!"

"Power? We have none against him," said the shepherd. "He has a sign on him more powerful than ours!"

"What sign?" replied the former proprietor of the Close. "Is it his breviary or his priest's tonsure?"

But the shepherds remained silent, indifferent to whatever Le Hardouey said as to the loss of their power and his insulting deductions.

"Cowards!" he said.

But they let the insult pass, stubbornly silent and immobile, like the stones upon which they were sitting.

"Ah, at any rate," continued Le Hardouey after a pause, "if you cannot do to him what you have done to me and—to her, can you not show me his destiny in your mirror and tell me if he is to burden the earth with the weight of his body for a long time still?"

The silence and immobility of the shepherds had something more irritating, more insolent, more implacable than the most outrageous words. It was the very indifference of deaf destiny that crushes without hearing the fall of the fragments.

"Brutes!" went on Thomas Le Hardouey. "You will not answer?" and his voice rose in an outbreak of anger. "Very well, I will get on without you!" and the expression he used he accompanied with an oath. "Keep your mirrors and your magic. I will

find out alone the day of death for the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan!"

"Ask him, Maître Thomas," said the shepherd in a sarcastic tone. "Here he comes! Don't you hear his filly neighing?"

And indeed, the horse and rider, tearing at a triple gallop, passed in the darkness like a hurricane, so near to the shepherds and Le Hardouey that they felt the breeze of the rapid passage, and it raised in the embers a little flame which went out at once.

"Try to catch him, Maître Thomas!" cried the shepherd, who took a cruel pleasure in fanning the flame of Le Hardouey's wrath.

He struck a stone on the road with his stick, which gave out a spark and broke under the force of the blow.

"Good!" said the shepherd. "Hit the stones. Dogs bite them, and your fury is as senseless as the fury of dogs. Do you think that a man like this abbé, more soldier than priest, would fall under an ash stick like a dandy at the fair of Varanguebec or Créance? There is but one ball that could kill a Croix-Jugan, Maître Thomas! And these balls are not cast by the Blues!"

"Is that the forecast about the abbé, shepherd?" said Le Hardouey, clenching his rough hand on the shepherd's shoulder and shaking him as if he were a branch. His eyes, dilated by desire exalted to madness, burned in the shadow like two live coals.

"Surely!" said the shepherd, from whom such

violence tore out a prophecy. "Between his two eyebrows he wears the M which says that he will die a terrible death. He will die as he has lived. Bullets have already made a bed in his face until the last which shall rest there will lay him low forever. He is the bridegroom of bullets! But the bride may wait to come until that hour when the Chouans and the Blues spend no more shot, as in times past, in the night air."

"Oh! I will find one!" cried Maître Le Har-douey, with the joy of a man who has found at last the idea of a certain vengeance which no event can turn aside since it is destiny. "I will find one, shepherd, though I should have to tear it with my nails from the windowpanes of the church of Blanchelande and chew it like mastic with my teeth into a bullet. And while I wait for it, here is something for your trouble since you did talk at last, stubborn-mouth!"

And he threw into the midst of the Shepherds' circle something that sounded like silver as it fell in the fire which flickered. Then he went away quickly through the moor, almost melting into it, so little noise he made as he disappeared. He knew these stretches and paths full of treachery. How many cares and cruel visions had followed him there already! On this night the moor with the fearful physiognomy had said its last word to him in the last word of the shepherd. He crossed it, his heart so full that he did not even hear the old patois chant of the shepherds, who began to sing

hypocritically as they counted the bits of money they had drawn out of the fire:

"Tire, lire, lire, my hood's all torn,
Tire, lire, lire, then mend it.
Tire, lire, lire, I have no needle,
Tire, lire, lire, go buy one.
Tire, lire, lire, no money have I,"—etc.

When they told this story to Maître Tainnebouy, they said that they had left the money in the embers, as the customs of their tribe did not permit them to take money for any prognostications. As it was not found, and as nevertheless it was easy in the morning to find ashen circles which marked the place in the moor where the shepherds had lifted the turf in the night, you might say that this fire of the warlocks, like the fire of hell, had melted them, unless some discreet passer-by picked them up without boasting of his trophy. For Normandy is no longer as it was in the time of its glorious duke, when, in passing through a forest, one might hang a gold bracelet or a silver necklace on the branch of an oak and find it there a year later.

All this happened toward the end of Lent in 18—. The shepherds, naturally very uncommunicative with the distrustful population, which employed them only from habit or terror, did not tell anyone that they had seen Le Hardouey in the moor (though they told it later); and no one, either in Blanchelande or Lessay, dreamed that Jeanne's husband

had reappeared even for an hour in the countryside.

Nevertheless, Easter arrived and this year it was to be celebrated more solemnly at Blanchelande than in any of the neighboring parishes. This is why. The period of penitence that his ecclesiastical superiors had imposed on the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan had passed. Three years of an externally regular life which he had led in Blanchelande appeared to be a sufficient expiation for his life as a party leader and his attempted suicide. In the minds of those who had the right to judge him the rumors concerning the former monk and Jeanne merited no belief. Now, when there is no real motive for scandal, the Church is too strong and too maternal in her justice to take account of an opinion which, if she did listen to it, would show no more than worldly wisdom. She pronounces with her usual majesty, "Woe to him who finds occasion for scandal!" and resists the fury of tongues and their confusion. Such had been her attitude toward the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan. She did not remove him from Blanchelande to send him to another point in the diocese where "he would have scandalized no one," according to these people of worldly wisdom who understand nothing of the profound practices of the Church. Calm, imperturbable, well informed, she had at the end of three years restored to the abbé his full powers of priest and it was he who was to sing high mass at Easter in the

Blanchelande church after so long an interruption of his sacred ministry.

When this news spread about the country, the people promised themselves to attend this mass by the celebrated Chouan monk, whose wounds and life, faintly lit up by the reflections of an extinguished war, had stirred the country with a curiosity mixed with terror. Had the bishop of Coutances himself come to celebrate the episcopal mass at Blanchelande, he would not have excited a curiosity comparable to that which the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan inspired. Cut out himself to be the bishop—by name, by character, and by capacity, they said—fit to be raised to the highest ranks in the Church, he would not doubtless remain at Blanchelande. The popular imagination already clad that proud shoulder in the cardinal's purple robe when the black cowl of penitence would be broken as the powerful movement of a lion tears the insulting and fragile nets in which they thought him snared. The Countess of Montsurvent, who never left her castle and never heard prayers except in her own chapel, came to this mass, and all the nobility in the neighborhood met there to honor in the person of the abbé the great gentleman and the commander in the war.

Easter fell very late that year. It was April, the 16th of April, for the date has remained famous. It was a beautiful spring day, said the old centenarian countess to me, when I talked to her about it, and she brought forth the fragments of her

memories to fill out the story told me by the brave grazier, Tainnebouy. The church of Blanchelande could hardly contain the crowd thronging under its arches. It is always fine weather on Easter day, the peasants of Cotentin affirm with a Christian superstition which is not lacking in grace. They always associate in their minds the resurrection of Christ with the resurrection of nature and accept as an immutable fact, whose law is founded on their faith, the simultaneity which the Church has established between the festivals of its ritual and the movements of the seasons. The snows of Christmas, the plaintive winds of Good Friday, the sun of Easter are proverbial expressions in Cotentin. The sun shone on that day, and lit up the church with those first joyous rays which are not quite the same as those of other days of the year. Oh, ravishing charm of those first days, charm so sweet only because so quickly dissipated and the memory of it so far distant!

All the pews in the church were occupied by the families who rent them by the year. Dressed in their best clothes, the peasants crowded out even into the lateral chapels and one saw on every side belts and red waistcoats with copper buttons, the age-long adornment of the dandies of lower Normandy. In the aisle of the nave there was but a tossing sea of those coifs that were called later by the dazzling name of *comets*, giving the young girls of the country a sort of heroic mischievousness that no other woman's coif has ever given! All these

white coifs so near one another that a preacher in a bad humor once compared them, precisely enough, to a flock of geese in a marsh, were agitated by a desire to see, for once, the famous Abbé of the *Torn Face* (as he was called thereabouts) without his cowl.

It was a popular nickname that would have been kept by his descendants in former times had he not been the last of his race. The only empty pew in this crowd of crammed pews was Mistress Le Hardouey's locked one. No one had ever been seen there since the death of the wife and the inexplicable disappearance of the husband. The empty pew recalled, on this Sunday, better than ever the whole story I have told. It set them thinking the more of that dead woman, of whom they were always thinking, whose memory brought infallibly to mind the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, the white monk of the ruined abbey, who was to celebrate high mass for the first time. They remembered that the tragedy of Jeanne's bewitching had begun in this pew, at a procession like this, and that the misfortune had come at the first glance emerging from those apertures through which, says Bossuet, *God pours light into man's mind*, and which under the pale forehead of this priest and the point of his cowl, seemed like two windows of hell; a *mouth of flame from the devil's oven*, the peasants said, who could paint with a word, as Zurbaran with a line. When they remembered the rumors which had run about concerning the abbé, whose echoes

would not die, they were breathless to see how he would look when he passed down by the pew of his victim (for they believed her his victim) that day when he was going to say mass and consecrate the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was an ordeal! In all these heads a drama was playing of which the last act had come and the dénouement was at hand. Nor would it be possible for me to paint the shiver of curiosity which circled suddenly in this crowd when the red banner of the parish which was to open the march of the procession commenced to float at the entrance of the choir and the first sound of the bell announced at the portal that the procession was to emerge. Who does not know, moreover, the perennial love of man for spectacles, even such as he has seen already. This banner which is only brought out at great festivals and from which fall, as from its tassels of gold and scarlet silk, an indescribable influence of joy and triumph upon the faithful; the silver cross with its veil embroidered by virgin hands; the sort of obelisk of white wax, which is called the pascal candle, that outrears the cross with its lighted tip; the primroses strewn along the nave, the first primroses of the year that the priests spread over the altars, washed on holy Saturday, whose fragrant remnants from the day before are mixed with the strong and tonic odor of cut box—all these details had their own sacred emotion. The procession sparkled with magnificent ornaments given by the Countess of Montsurvent

and worn to-day for the first time. She had wished her great Abbé de la Croix-Jugan (for it was thus she was in the habit of calling him) to say his first mass after his penitence in a purple and a splendor worthy of him. As was customary, he came last in the solemn throng, preceded by the pastor of Varanguebec and the Curé Caillemer, both in dalmatics, for they were to assist as deacon and subdeacon at the altar. The crowd stretched their necks at its passage and a number of young girls stood on the footstools of their pews as the procession advanced down the nave. The blue day entering by the wide-open portals, spreading its light to the very depths of the choir, mysterious with somber stained glass, throwing its vivid whiteness around the pillars, struck full in the face that extraordinary visage they wished to see, though shuddering at the sight, which produced the magnetic horror of abysses. Only, without thinking of it assuredly, the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan held this curiosity in abeyance, avid as it was to contemplate finally the whole of his appalling physiognomy. As celebrant, he wore the stole, the alb, and the cope, but he had kept his black cowl, clasping his cope above it so that his head did not emerge from its usual frame, closed by the bar of the black velvet chin-strap which he always wore.

"Those who were most surprised and most taken aback," said Maître Tainnebouy, who claimed to have heard all these details from Nônon herself, "were the Blanchelande girls, sir. When he passed

near the pew of the unhappy woman whose ruin he had caused, no one would have known that he even had a heart by the look of his face. There was nothing to be seen, neither *stringo* nor *stringuette*, and they asked one another in low voices if he had a license from the Pope to say mass in a cowl. But don't worry, sir, the sequel proves that he had not; and the girls and the boys of Blanchelande and many others saw more of this mass than they wished."

Thus, for a moment, the general curiosity and expectation were disappointed. The Abbé de la Croix-Jugan had nothing new about him but the cope clasped over his breast with a clasp of precious stones of prodigious brilliancy in the eyes of the dazzled peasants.

"How many times since I have looked at it! for such a mass of stones never shone like that on the breasts of our priests," they said to the Countess de Montsurvent, who explained the phenomena partly as imagination, partly by the cloak of the cowl which threw out the white brilliancy of the stones, but she could not help smiling a little at these incredible superstitions.

The procession wound round the church, along the walls of the cemetery, and entered again by the portal which remained open. There were so many people at Blanchelande that day, and the weather was so mild and almost warm, that a great many people were grouped about the portal, hear-

ing the mass from there. Some of them were even under the yew tree planted opposite the portal.

Nevertheless, during the time taken for chanting the *Introit*, while the celebrant goes to put on the sacred ornaments, the doors of the sacristy opened and the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, preceded by the choir-boys bearing candles, by thurifers, and by deacons, appeared on the threshold in his chasuble and walked slowly toward the altar. The stir of curiosity as the procession passed began again, but this time there was no disappointment. The cowl had gone and the ideal head of the abbé could be seen without any veil.

Never had the imagination of a sculptor, the dream of a great artist gone mad, accomplished what the chance of a load of shot and the tearing of bandages from wounds by the Blues had produced upon this face, once so divinely beautiful that it was compared to that of the martial archangel of battle.

What were the most celebrated wounds in history compared with the marks on the face of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, to the stigmata which so shockingly echoed the sublime words of the Duke de Guise to his son: "The sons of great races must know how to build their renown on the ruins of their own bodies!"

For the first time the people saw in all its thunder-stricken splendor the disaster of this head ordinarily half hidden and already terrifying in what they did see. His hair cut very short, already

touched by the first flakes of premature snow, shone on his temples and showed the planes of his livid cheeks harrowed by shot. It was a whole massacre, said Tainnebouy, with wild poetry, but a massacre showing implacable defiance of destiny, so that when our eyes were turned aside from it they were almost like the eyes of Moses turning from the burning bush which held God. There was, indeed, a strength of soul like a god's in this man, greater than mortality, who seemed to have vanquished death when he resisted it. Although he was ready to offer the Holy Sacrifice and he advanced with lowered eyes, an air of devotion, and with folded hands—hands that had borne the sword forbidden to priests, whose veined and nervous contours showed the strength of hawks in their clutch—he was still the chief born to command and to lead his troops. With his great height, the shining whiteness of his chasuble embroidered in gold, which the sun, falling through one of the choir windows, seemed suddenly to set on fire, he seemed no longer a man, but the pillar of fire which marched in front of Israel and guided it through the desert. The old Countess de Montsurvent still spoke of that moment, from the height of her hundred years, as if it were in front of her, when Blanchelande, kneeling, saw this priest, of colossal form, stand at the foot of the altar and begin the fatal mass which was never to be finished.

No one then was thinking of his crimes. No one dared keep in the folds of his subjugated soul a

single evil thought of him. He was worthy of the powers that the church gave back to him, and the calm of his grandeur when he mounted the steps of the altar answered for his innocence. An ephemeral impression, but for the moment all powerful! They forgot Jeanne Le Hardouey. They forgot everything they had believed only a moment ago.

Seen at the altar through the azure haze of the censers vomiting tongues of fire from their silver urns swinging before his terrible face, upon which the sentiment of the mass he was singing began to throw an unaccustomed glory, fixing itself there like an aureole, paling the brilliancy of the torches, he was the culminating point on which the fervent and respectful attention of the crowd centered. The deep vibrations of his voice echoed in all breasts. The slowness of his gesture, his inspired lips, the way he turned round with open arms toward the faithful to give them the peace of God—all the sublime postures of the priest who is praying and is going to consecrate, in which the sublimity of his personality was incarnate in a magnificent harmony, caught these hostile peasants and melted their hostility into nothingness.

The mass proceeded to the middle of the *Alleluias* of enthusiasm for the great day. He had chanted the *Preface*. The priests who assisted said later that they had never heard such accents come from a human mouth. It was no swan song, no song of that weak earthy bird who has no place

in a Christian heaven, but the last cries of the eagle of the evangelist lifting itself to eternal heights since it has to die. He consecrated, they said, as the saints consecrate; and truly if he had ever been guilty, they believed him more than pardoned. They believed that the fire of Isaiah had consumed all of the old Adam in its devouring purification when, kneeling near him and holding the hem of his pontifical tunic, the deacons saw him raise the stainless Host in his hands, uplifted toward God. The entire crowd was prostrate in mute adoration. The *O salutaris hostia!* was about to come with its silver voice from this august and profound silence—but it never came. A gun-shot from the open portal! The Abbé de la Croix-Jugan fell, his head upon the altar.

He was dead.

Cries of horror burst from the crowd, sharp, brief; everything stopped, even the bell which sounded the sacrament of the mass was silent, as if the cold of an immense terror had mounted even to the belfry and seized it.

Who can worthily describe this scene, unique among horrible spectacles? The Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, prone on the altar, torn away by the deacons from the sacred table which he was soiling with his blood and laid on the lower steps in his sacerdotal vestments, in the midst of the overwhelmed priests and overturned torches; the crowd, risen up, all heads turned, some trying to see what was happening at the altar and others looking to see whence

the shot came; the double movement of this crowd oscillating from choir to portal—all this formed an inexpressible disorder, as if fire had broken out in the church or lightning had melted the roof of the belfry.

"The Abbé de la Croix-Jugan has been assassinated!" the words flew from mouth to mouth. The Countess de Montsurvent, who had the courage of her house, tried to make her way to the choir, but she could not penetrate the huddled crowd.

"Close the doors! Arrest the assassin!" the voices cried. But no man and no arms were seen. The gun-shot had been heard. It had come from the portal, sent probably over the heads of the prostrate faithful, and he who had sent it had escaped, thanks to the first moment of surprise and confusion. They looked for him, they questioned.

Chaos seized the church which was resounding but a few minutes earlier to the joyous chant of *Alleluia!* There were two distinct scenes in the chaos: the crowd pushing to the portal and, at the grille of the sanctuary in the choir, the priests out of their stalls and the choristers, pale, frightened, surrounding the inanimate body, and the two deacons, standing near, pale as winding-sheets, a prey to indignation and horror. A frightful crime ending in sacrilege! the Host, stained with blood, had fallen beside the chalice. The Curé of Varanguébec took it and communicated.

Then the Curé of Varanguébec, who was a powerful man and a robust priest, commanded silence

in a thundering voice and, strangely enough, due doubtless to such a scene, he obtained it. Then he took off his dalmatic and, with nothing but his alb stained with the blood which had spurted from all sides upon the altar, he mounted the pulpit and said:

"My brothers, the church is profaned. The Abbé de la Croix-Jugan has just been assassinated while he was offering the Divine Sacrifice. We will carry his body to the priests' house and have the burial in the parish of Neufmesnil. The church of Blanchelande will remain closed until Our Lord of Coutances shall come solemnly to open it and purify it. He alone of episcopal right, and not we, a humble priest, can cleanse this place of detestable sacrilege. Go, my brothers, go back to your homes, in terror and meditation. The judgments of God are terrible and his ways hidden. Go, the mass is said. *Ite, missa est!*"

And he came down from the pulpit. The most profound silence reigned in the crowd as it slipped slowly out. The more curious remained to see the priests extinguish the torches and veil the sacred tabernacle. They put out everything, even the choir lamp, that lamp which burns day and night, the symbol of perpetual adoration. Then the priests raised on their interlaced arms the body of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan in his bloody chasuble, reciting in a low voice the *De Profundis*. The last person on the threshold of the deserted church, the Curé Caillemer, closed the doors as under the seven

seals of the wrath of the Lord. A few people lingering in the cemetery were told to go, and the gates were closed as the doors of the church had been. Strange and sinister Easter day! The overpowering memory of it was transmitted to the next generation. It might have been said that they had gone back to the Middle Ages and that the parish of Blanchelande had been put under a ban.

Chapter Fifteen

IT WAS only forty days after this frightful drama, the recital of which, even in the mouth of the peasant who told it to me, seemed as pathetic as the murder of that Medici struck down in the church of Florence by the conspiracy of the Pazzi, which furnished Italian historians the occasion for so terrible a page, when the Bishop of Coutances, accompanied by numerous clergy, came to reopen and reconsecrate the Blanchelande church. It was an imposing ceremony and its solemnity deepened in all minds the memory of that famous Easter festival interrupted by a murder.

As to the murderer, everyone believed that it was Thomas Le Hardouey, but there was never any certain and material proof that it was so. The shepherds told what had happened that night in the moor; but they hated Le Hardouey and perhaps were avenging themselves upon his memory. Were they telling the truth? They were pagans in whom you could not put too much faith.

Assuredly Le Hardouey had more than anyone else a motive for vengeance in killing the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan. The wedge of shot which, piercing the head of the Abbé from end to end, had struck the base of the great silver chandelier on the left of the tabernacle, was recognized as being a bit of

the lead taken from one of the windows of the choir with the point of a knife; and this circumstance seemed to confirm the story of the shepherds.

So Le Hardouey had done what he had said; for they recognized also that the shot had been chewed with teeth either to get it into the barrel of the gun or to make the wound fatal. Except for this uncertain idea, all proof was lacking to justice. When the people who heard mass at the portal (and they were mainly women) were asked, they replied that they had only heard the shot above their heads when they were kneeling, bowed down at the Elevation.

Their surprise, their fright was so great that the man who fired the gun had had time to run to the bars and jump over without being recognized. Only one old beggar, who could not kneel because of the condition of her poor legs, remained standing, her hands on her stick, her back against the black trunk of the yew tree, and she saw all of a sudden a man's broad back at the portal and above this back the end of a gun aimed, which glittered in the sun. After the shot the man turned around, but he had a black veil over his face, she said, and he escaped like a cat chased by a dog. All this, she added, took place so quickly, and she had been so overcome, that she could not even cry out.

If it were Le Hardouey, he was never discovered either at Blanchelande, or at Lessay nor any of the neighboring parishes, and his disappearance, which

had lasted ever since, remained as mysterious as it had been just after the death of his wife. Only if it stuck in men's minds, said Tainnebouy, that the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan had bewitched Jeanne-Madelaine, there remained also a firm conviction in the minds of the whole countryside that Le Hardouey was the assassin, avenging himself on the former monk.

Such was Maître Louis Tainnebouy's story of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan whose name had remained in the land the subject of a sinister tradition. I have already said, but it seems to me necessary to insist, that the farmer of Mont-de-Rauville omitted in his recital many of the details which I owed later to the Countess Jacqueline de Montsurvent; only these details which depended entirely upon the countess's way of seeing and feeling and upon her high social position in no wise bore upon the reality and dramatic circumstances of the story that the Cotentin told me. In these matters the identity was complete; though the way of looking at the circumstances was different.

Nevertheless, in the ideas of this feudal centenarian, this cripple from whom age had stolen all the last enthusiasms, if there had ever been any in her temperament, to whom civil wars had given the fiber and the cold of steel, the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan was, as much as in the mind of the honest farmer, one of those enigmatic and formidable personages that, once seen, can never be forgotten.

Maître Tainnebouy was talking a good deal from

hearsay and from having seen him once or twice at one end of the Blanchelande church, from the opposite end. But the old countess had known him; she had not merely seen him at a distance which might "transform floating banners"; she had sat elbow to elbow with him in the everyday course of life which overturns pedestals and dwarfs the greatest men.

"Do you see that place?" she said to me one day when I was speaking of him, and she pointed with her finger, white as wax and covered with rings to the first knuckle, to a sort of episcopal pulpit of ebony, ancient in form and placed opposite her dais. "That's where he sat when he came to Montsurvent. No one ever sits there now. He spent many hours there! When he rode into the court, I, who am always alone in this empty hall, with the portraits of the Montsurvents and the Toustains (for the old Countess Jacqueline was a Toustain), recognized the noise of his horse's hoofs and trembled in my old marrowless bones and yellowed laces like a bride awaiting the bridegroom. For were we not betrothed to the same dead things? Old Soutyras—for everything is old about me—announced him, raising the portière down there with an arm trembling with the terror he inspired in everyone, and then he entered, his forehead hid in his hood, and came to kiss this lonely hand with his mutilated lips—a hand which has lacked kisses of respect since age and the Revolution have fallen upon this hoary head. Then he sat down, and after a few words he

was lost in his silence and I in mine. For since the Chouan war was over and he had no hope of reviving it in this miserable country where the peasants will fight for nothing but their own dunghills, he had nothing more to tell me and we had no further need of speech."

"What, Countess!" I cried, believing at least that the grandiose and severe intimacy between this virile and vanquished man and this woman dispossessed of everything except life would at least express itself in their solitude by proud exclamations of rage and regret. "You did not even talk! And you went on thus for years!"

"Only two years," she said, "the time that he lived in Blanchelande after all hope was lost, until his death. What was there to say? We understood each other without speech. Yes, once he did speak to me," she said, correcting herself and lowering her shaking head as if she were searching for something between her corset and her bosom, that final movement of a woman who is searching for memories where in youth she kept her love letters. "It was when the unfortunate, fatal Duke d'Enghien——"

She hesitated, and this hesitation seemed to me so sublime that I spared her the trouble of finishing.

"Yes," I said to her, "I understand——"

"Ah yes, you understand," she said with the vague light in the depths of her glance of a cold and faded blue swimming in an almost sepulchral white, "you understand; but I may tell you that a

hundred years of pain pave the lips to pronounce anything."

She stopped, then she went on:

"That day he came earlier than usual. He did not kiss my hand, but he said: 'The Duke d'Enghien is dead, shot in the moat of Vincennes. The Royalists have not the courage to avenge him!' I cried out. It was my last outcry. He gave me the details of that terrible death and walked up and down as he gave them. When it was over he sat down and fell into a silence which was not broken henceforth. Also," she added after a pause, "there is not much difference to me in his being alive or dead, as he is now. Old people live in their thoughts; I still see him! Ask Vasselin, if I do not often say to her evenings when she brings in my syrup of bitter orange: 'Tell me, Vasselin, is there anyone there—in the black chair?' I always believe that the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan is sitting there!"

Truly this Trappist silence between these two solitary creatures, last remainders of a society that had passed, this friendship or habit of a man who came to sit regularly in the same place, and who passed on the contagion of his silence to a woman so haughty that nothing could influence her much any more, yes, truly this was the last touch of the painter finishing and putting before me the figure of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, this man formed to overwhelm the imagination of others, and to count among those exceptional individuals who

find no place in the frame of written history, but who find it again in the history which is not written, for history, like poetry, has its rhapsodies—hidden and collective Homers that are passed on, sowing the legend in the mind of the masses. The following generations browse over this marvelous cytisus for a long time with a naïve and hungry mouth till the hour strikes when the last leaf is carried away by the last memory and forgetfulness seizes forever everything that is great and poetic among men.

Chapter Sixteen

AS FOR the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, legend came after history.

"I confess," I said to the Cotentin grazier, when he had finished the tragic story—"I confess these are strange and terrible matters; but what connection, Maître Louis Tainnebouy, has his Easter mass with the one we heard ringing two hours ago, which you called the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan's mass?"

"What connection?" said Maître Tainnebouy. "It is not very difficult, according to what I have heard told."

"And what have you heard, Maître Louis?" I replied. "For I wish, since you have told me this much, to know all that there is of the story of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan."

"You are quite right, sir," said the Cotentin, whose words no longer had the same vivacity that they had when he was telling me the story. "Moreover, you heard the nine strokes at Blanchelande and you must know why they rang. Since I have told you this much I shall have to finish, although perhaps it would have been better not to have commenced."

It was evident that the farmer of Mont-de-Rauville, this reasonable, cool-headed fellow, so calm, with so definite a sense for the practical values of

life, was prey to a secret terror, arising doubtless from the child he had lost in the cradle after having heard the nine strokes of Blanchelande sound, and in any case, for one reason or another, he repented having gossiped about the dead.

However, he surmounted his repugnance and replied:

"It was just a year to the day since the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan had died. It was then Easter day of the following year. During the year they had talked a great deal about him at night on the farms or coming home late from the fairs and markets, and everywhere—it was a chattering which never ended, and it has rung like the devil in my ears all through my youth. Yes, this gossip lasted a long time.

"At that time I saw at Lessay a white heifer with black interlaced horns bent down over its muzzle like the former monk's cowl, and it was called on this account the monk of Blanchelande, so imbued were they with the story of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan. The nickname, for that matter, had brought misfortune to the animal, for it had been disemboweled on the iron spike of a fence in a fit of madness, and some said that they had done wrong and a great wrong and had been punished for giving an animal the name which had belonged to a priest.

"Well, it was Easter day, and the Curé Caillemer in his morning sermon had recommended to mercy the soul of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, whose death

had so overwhelmed Blanchelande. The minds of all were more full of him than ever.

"Pierre Cloud, the apprentice of the blacksmith at Dussaucey, who had poured out so many drinks for Le Hardouey the night that he returned to the Close and did not find his wife, was returning from Lessay, where he had spent the day, and stayed rather late tippling with the boys—he had not taken enough to miss his way and, moreover, those who accused him of having had the sunset in his eyes agreed later that he spoke the pure and holy truth and that his eyes were not deceived.

"The night was black as pitch, but the weather was fine all the same, and Pierre Cloud walked quietly and was, perhaps among all the people in Blanchelande, the one who was thinking least of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan. He had left the evening before and, in consequence, had not attended the Curé Caillemer's sermon, nor heard them talking in the taverns of Blanchelande, as they did talk that day of the former monk assassinated just a year ago. But when he was not far from the cemetery which he was obliged to cross to reach the village, and as he was walking along the thorn hedge which was planted by the garden wall of Amant Hebert, the chief liquor dealer of the village, who furnished all the priests in the canton, he heard nine strokes of the bell that we heard to-night ringing over the moor, and he stopped as you did, sir.

"I have heard him say himself that the nine strokes brought out the sweat on his back and that

he dropped to the earth—excuse me, sir—as if the strokes of the bell had fallen upon his head, thick as the hammer on the anvil.

“But as the bell was silent and no longer rang, and he could not remain there until daylight while his wife was awaiting him at home, he thought he had caroused a little too much with his friends at Lessay and he took up the road to Blanchelande, when, arriving at the cemetery hedge, he felt the devil of a trembling in his marrow and saw a bright light shining through the three windows of the church’s choir.

“He thought at first that it was the lamp sending its light through the windows; but the lamp could never have given so red a light, ‘so that it was like the fire in my forge,’ he told me when we talked about it together. The flaming window-panes made him believe that he had not dreamed when he heard the bell.

“‘I am no more blind than a fool,’ he thought. ‘What is there in the church at this hour that such a light should burn, and yet the old church is silent as after complines, and the windows on the lower side do not give out a single ray of light. It is between Easter Sunday and Easter Monday, but it is too late for the evening service. What is it, then?’

“He remained there terrified on the fence, spying over the tombs reddened by that violent blaze which might perhaps break into a thousand pieces the windows against which it seemed to be lighted.

"'But, stop!' he said to himself, 'the priests have their own ideas and are not like others. Who knows what they may be up to in the church at this hour while everyone is asleep? I am going to look into it.'

"He jumped over the fence and advanced resolutely toward the portal.

"I have already told you, sir, that it was the old portal torn from its hinges at the abbey. The Blues had pierced it with more than one ball; it was riddled with holes to which you could set your eye. Pierre Cloud looked as he had so often looked, wandering by there on Sunday, when he wanted to see where they were in the mass, and then he saw a thing that made his hair stand on end like a hedge-hog's seized by an adder. He saw clearly the back of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan standing at the foot of the high altar. There was no one in the church, as black as a forest with all its columns. But the altar was lighted up and it was the light of these torches that made the windows red as Pierre Cloud had seen from the bars. The Abbé de la Croix-Jugan was there, as he had been a year ago to a day, without his cowl and bare-headed; but the head of which Pierre Cloud could only see the back of the neck had blood on the tonsure, and this blood splashed all over the chasuble was not fresh and flowing as it had been a year ago, when the priests carried him away in their arms.

"'I do not remember,' said Pierre Cloud, 'ever to have been very much afraid in my life, but this

time I was terrified. I heard a voice saying to me very low: "That is enough, my boy," and it counseled me to withdraw, but I was fixed as a stake in the earth at the damned portal and eager to see. He was the only one at the altar. Neither acolyte nor deacon nor choir boy. He was alone; he rang the silver bell which was on the steps when he commenced the Introit. He answered himself as if he were two persons. At the *Kyrie eleison* he did not sing—it was low mass he was saying and he spoke fast. I thought of nothing but of looking. My whole life was gathered together at the hole in the door. All of a sudden, at the first *Dominus vobiscum*, which forced him to turn around, I was obliged to push my fingers into the other holes around the one I was looking through, in order not to fall backward. I saw that his face was more horrible than it had been in life, for it was like those which roll out in cemeteries when they dig up old graves and uncover old bones. Only the wounds which had marked the abbé's face were more deeply marked on the bones. The eyes only were living as in a living head, and they burned like two candles. Oh, I thought that they saw my eye peering through the hole of the portal and that their burning fire would put my eye out. But I was possessed to see to the end and I went on looking! He continued to murmur his prayer, making his own responses and ringing at the places where he ought to ring; but the further he went the more he seemed troubled; he was embarrassed; he stopped. You would believe that he had forgotten

the words! It was true! he did not know any more! Nevertheless he went on, hesitating at every word like a stammerer and going on until he reached the Preface; then he stopped short. He took his death's head in his skeleton hands, like a lost man who tries to remember something that may save him, but he could not remember. A kind of rage swelled his breast—he wanted to consecrate, but he let the chalice fall upon the altar. He touched it as if it might devour his hand. He looked as if he had gone mad. Truly! a mad dead man! Can the dead ever go mad? It was more than horrible. I expected to see the devil come out from the altar and throw himself on him and carry him away. The last time that he turned around he had tears, big tears, that looked like melted lead, running all down his cheeks. He was weeping, weeping as if he were alive! “It is God punishing him!” I said to myself, “and what a punishment!” Evil thoughts arose in me. You know all the frightful things they had said about the reputation of this priest and Jeanne Le Hardouey. Doubtless he was damned, but he suffered enough to make the devil himself take pity. Truly by Saint Paternus, Bishop of Avranches, it was worse than hell for him, this mass that he was determined to finish, yet which escaped his memory and his lips. He had a sort of bloody sweat mingled with his tears, which, lighted by the candles, rolled down his face and almost to his breast, like vitriol, or like shot in the gutter of a mold for balls. When I tell you that he recommenced this impossible mass more than twenty

times, I do not lie. He was exhausted. He had froth on his mouth like a man falling with epilepsy. But he did not fall; he remained standing. He was praying all the time, but he confused the words of the mass and from time to time twisted his arms above his head, and stretched them toward the tabernacle like two pincers, as if he were asking grace of an irritated God who would not answer.

“‘I was so overwhelmed by such a spectacle that I could not go away. I forgot everything, my wife waiting for me, the late hour, and I remained glued to the portal until daylight. For it was only by day that this terrible celebrant of the mass went back weeping into the sacristy without having been able to get further than the Consecration. The doors of the sacristy opened themselves for him, turning slowly on their hinges as if they had been lately oiled. The candles went out as the doors of the sacristy had opened, without any aid.

“‘The nave began to lighten. Everything in the church was tranquil and as usual. I went away broken in mind and body and did not speak one word of it to my wife. It was later that I spoke of it, because everyone else in the parish was talking. One morning the sacristan, Grouard, had found, upon opening the church, that the water in the holy-water founts was boiling, steaming like pitch. It was only little by little that it became quiet and cool again, but it seems that during the mass of this accursed priest it always boiled!’

“Such was the story of Pierre Cloud himself,” added Louis Tainnebouy, whose voice, as he told

me, had undergone the same alterations as when he began to tell me the story of the nocturnal mass, "and this, sir, is what they call the mass of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan."

I must admit that the last part of this story, this supernatural expiation, seemed to me more tragic than the story itself. Was it the hour in which a believer in this frightful vision told it? Was it the stage of this dramatic tale that we were actually treading with our feet? Was it the nine strokes we heard, the sonorous echoes still sounding in our ears and pouring a chill into our hearts? Was it all these combined and confounded which made me share the conviction of this man robust in body and in mind? But I admit for an instant I had ceased to belong to the nineteenth century and that I believed everything that Tainnebouy told me, as he believed it.

Later I wished to justify my faith, by following up the habits and fancies of this sad time, and I came back to spend a few months in the neighborhood of Blanchelande. I was determined to spend the night at the hole in the portal, like Pierre Cloud, the blacksmith, and to see with my own eyes what he had seen, but as the times when the nine strokes of the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan's mass rang out were irregular and far apart, although they still heard them ring at times, so the old people in the countryside told me, and my affairs took me away from the neighborhood, I never carried out my plan.

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